

# The English Scene In the 18<sup>th</sup> Century

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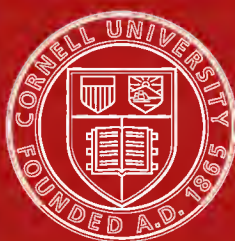
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THE ENGLISH SCENE  
IN THE EIGHTEENTH  
CENTURY

*By the Same Author*

**ROBERT HARLEY**

**Earl of Oxford**

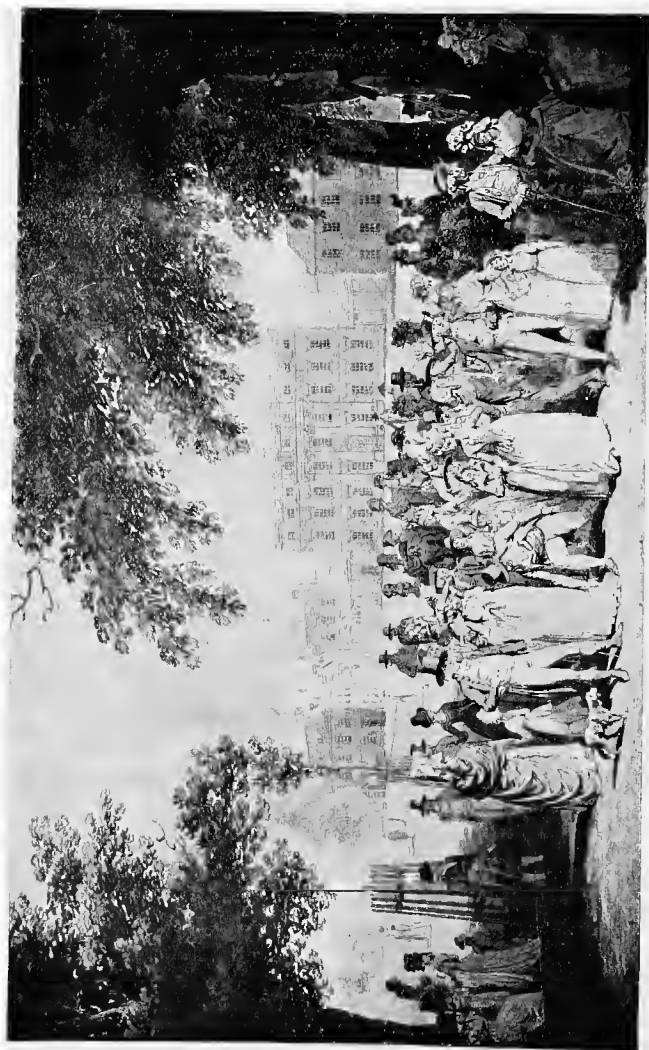
A Study of Politics and Letters in the Age of Anne

*By the Same Author and Helen Clergue*

**GEORGE SELWYN**

**His Letters and His Life**





BUCKINGHAM PALACE IN 1790.





# THE ENGLISH SCENE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

BY

E. S. ROSCOE

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To

THOMAS SECCOMBE

THE FRIENDLY CRITIC AND THE CRITICAL FRIEND



## PREFATORY NOTE

IN one of his later essays Sir Leslie Stephen complained that too much value is placed on the publication of minute new facts relating to the history of the eighteenth century. The aim of students of the society of that age should be, he went on to say, to systemize the materials which are already in existence; in other words, to form a clear and general view of the age. His last work, "English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century," is an admirable example of the practical performance of a theoretical precept. The object of this book is to follow—however imperfectly—the same ideal, and to present to the reader some of the more important and characteristic aspects of England in the eighteenth century. These aspects, whether of places or of people, we must realize if we would form an accurate mental picture of the scene, and obtain its proper value from the mass of data which have from time to time been made available to those interested in this epoch.

Anatole France somewhere says that poets tell us what we vaguely think. Possibly in the chapters which follow some may find mental pictures and

conclusions of which they have thought, but which have not hitherto grown into definite forms, or found articulate expression.

To attain the object in view it was necessary that the treatment of the subject should be at once broad and simple ; to enter minutely into details, to offer illustrations of every statement of fact or of opinion, would lessen clearness of outline. It would have been equally inappropriate to load the following pages with references, since a view presented in a few lines is frequently the result of the consideration of many facts, and of numerous authorities. Some references have, however, been inserted, chiefly to enable a reader who desires to follow a particular subject at length, to have at hand some guide when he begins his quest.

My debt of gratitude to Mr. Thomas Seccombe is acknowledged on another page ; to Miss Helen Clergue also I am very grateful for valuable aid.

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# THE ENGLISH SCENE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

## *PART I*

### INTRODUCTORY OUTLOOK

As we survey the face of England in the eighteenth century our attention is instantly arrested by three cities, widely separated, and conspicuous above all other urban communities of the land, each having definite and different characteristics which are intimately involved with the peculiar life of the epoch. Of these cities the first is the Capital, with its long-existing historic traditions, its close association with every change in the political growth of the nation, the centre of the intellectual life of the people. It is visible, set in this particular period, as a capital. It comes into view from afar and it passes into the future, as a capital, in each phase of its history evidencing the influences of the age.

In the South-West of England, appropriately placed in a pleasant land and in a soft atmosphere, are the dignified and handsome buildings amidst which we

discern a varied throng enjoying the City of Pleasure, a special product of the time; one which disappears with the century.

Separated alike from London and from Bath by some hundreds of miles, wherein are county and cathedral towns—not differing markedly from the same towns to-day—and stretches of farm-land and villages, we note, on a northern estuary within sight of the western seas, isolated and self-contained, the abode of shipowners and of seamen—the Seaport.

We have passed two towns not appreciably smaller than Liverpool, though in fact less in population, Birmingham and Manchester,<sup>1</sup> the one the centre of the Midland hardware, the other of the Lancashire weaving trade. But though each had a technical and commercial individuality, neither had the distinct and epoch-marking character of the three cities which may be distinguished by illustrative appellations. Collectively, Birmingham, Manchester, and other urban communities, especially of the Midlands and of the North, were much alike; they furnish examples of classes of men of supreme importance in the history of the age, though these are not connected with any one particular town. They must be described when we come to view some sections of the people in relation to the century, without reference to special localities.

It is with the Capital that we are in the first place concerned.

<sup>1</sup> In 1781 Liverpool was estimated to have 39,000 inhabitants, Manchester (without Salford) in 1773, 22,000, and Birmingham in 1770, 30,000.

## CHAPTER I

### THE CAPITAL

LONDON to-day is a huge aggregation of considerable towns ; in the eighteenth century it was one great and homogeneous city, the largest in Europe, with a population estimated at 725,903 souls.<sup>1</sup> Small though it was compared with the enormous London of our own age, striking differences are to be noted between its people and those of the provincial towns, as of the rural districts, and its society was marked by some special features. In fact, an appreciation of London as a whole ; not only objectively—of its streets, its houses, its business, and its amusements—but of the moral and mental characteristics of the men and women who formed its society, in a word, of the Londoner, implies an understanding of the most conspicuous part of England in the eighteenth century. To know London is to know the Capital of the Empire, with all that is implied by the expression—the innumerable, varied, and vital, interests. Outside of the metropolis, and distinct from it, was the rest of the kingdom with its own life and characteristics. Volumes have been written on that part of London, commonly

<sup>1</sup> Maitland, "History of London" (1772), vol. ii. p. 744.

#### 4 LONDON EARLY IN THE CENTURY

called the West End, which has been pictured for us in multitudinous memoirs so that we cannot dissociate the England of the Georges from St. James's Street. Yet this locality was only the centre of a portion, though, relatively to its numbers, a most influential one, of the society of the kingdom.

In the first half of the eighteenth century the country lay quiescent after prolonged political and religious conflicts; years of internal turmoil were followed by years of peace. England was politically fatigued. Still conscious of the shocks which she had endured at the Revolution and the Rebellion, and of the constant anxiety of the age of Anne, she was grateful for rest at home, and thankful for the Hanoverian dynasty, which had become a symbol of popular freedom. This dominant note was most marked in London, which, as the heart of the kingdom, was most sensitive to the feeling of relief and, as a capital, was most capable of appreciating material prosperity. But the national energy, the dynamic force of the nation, had not lessened, the temperament and the fibre of the people had not changed, and beneath the quietude of the eighteenth century were the old and often tried inherent vigour and common sense. We must seek for evidences, however, of these qualities not so much in London as in provincial centres, in Lancashire, in Yorkshire, in Derbyshire, where the genius of the inventor and the enterprise of the manufacturer were changing the face of the country and the habits of its people, were founding a new

class, and causing social, and eventually political, changes throughout England.

The striking difference between the size of the Metropolis in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries increases the difficulty of realizing to-day the life of the Londoner in the former age. We are so accustomed to London as we see it, throbbing with palpable energy, and, as we daily move about in it, scarcely aware of its vitality and its immensity, only conscious in a vague way of its vast size and of the infinite occupations of its people, that it is not easy to comprehend it as it appeared to our forefathers. London at the period of our survey was in a state of change ; it was, as it is to-day, growing ; it was in course of transformation from a collection of separate but neighbouring communities into a single city. But it was a change rather in the nature of consolidation than of expansion. In the twentieth century London, a vast metropolis, irresistibly expands, overspreading rural districts, and absorbing large villages. In the eighteenth century this distinction between the capital and the communities around it was less conspicuous, and places around London and Westminster—Stepney and Kensington for instance—gradually joined with, rather than were absorbed by, the main town. The cities of London and Westminster were, however, united, and some of the villages which had existed around them were just becoming parts of the town.

If a stranger had hired a phaeton and started from

Tyburn turnpike to take a survey of the scene, and had happened to choose a Monday morning before 1783—after that date executions took place in front of Newgate—he would probably have found himself entangled in a disreputable crowd, the nearest approach to which nowadays would be the throng at the entrance to a racecourse. Opposite the spot on which the Marble Arch now stands he would have noticed one or more gallows, and carts containing the condemned persons with arms pinioned and a rope round their necks and coffins by them, men and women, murderers or simple thieves, received by jeers and cheers, by murmurs and shouts, from the excited and expectant populace. As each vehicle placed beneath the gallows moved away, a dangling body would have been seen against the sky. This would be seized by those who had been the friends of the executed man, who holding it, by their weight sought to end his sufferings. If the stranger had waited longer he would have noticed women in black, the womenfolk of the dead, claiming the corpses of their relatives, or a surgeon eager for experiments carrying off the body of a friendless felon. Anxious to escape from this frequent, and to us shocking, spectacle, the result at once of a cruel criminal law and a brutal population, our friend would have driven along Tyburn Road and Oxford Street. On his left were a few streets, of which, on first starting, Berkeley Street was the northern boundary; beyond Marylebone Street and Queen Anne Square were the Marylebone

Gardens, and then a long succession of open fields extended to the north. He would presently pass along Great Russell Street noting Montague House, and there, after 1753,<sup>1</sup> he could have, if so inclined, tarried for a time and inspected the Harleian manuscripts. A few yards farther was Bedford or Southampton House, a white building, long and low, with a courtyard, behind it were delightful and shady gardens from which were charming views of the green heights of Highgate across Lamb's Conduit Fields. These noble mansions, and others not inferior to them in various parts of eighteenth-century London, were not merely architectural features of the capital, however noticeable. They emphasised the supreme political and social position of the aristocracy, not, as to-day, lost among the miscellaneous crowds of men and dwellings in the West End, but dominant over, and apart from, the general population of the town.

Continuing along Great Ormond Street the wayfarer would soon approach the Foundling Hospital which kindly Captain Thomas Coram had established in 1741, and which had not a house near it. Thence, keeping to the outskirts of the town, he would reach the southern end of Finsbury Fields, near the junction of the City Road and Old Street. He would, if it were summer, pass numbers of wayfarers driving or walking to Bagnigge or Sadler's Wells, some hoping by drinking the waters

<sup>1</sup> Montague House was purchased as a British Museum in 1753, primarily to hold the Cottonian and Harleian MSS,

## 8 EASTERN DISTRICTS OF THE CAPITAL

to improve their health, others going thither only for enjoyment. As he turned southward, on his left hand the houses of Hoxton village might be seen among the trees, while beyond the open space of Upper Moorfields, which was laid out with walks, a collection of unimportant streets and houses extended eastwards to a line of which the centre was High Street, Whitechapel. Beyond was a succession of green fields with a few houses grouped round Bethnal Green.

The explorer would then come down Finsbury, past Bethlehem Hospital to the Royal Exchange. If minded to drive to the eastern termination of London, he had little more than a mile to traverse ; for when he reached the end of Whitechapel Street by the London Hospital, before him would have stretched the high road running through the villages of Mile End, New Town, and Old Town. To the southward lay the quiet village of Stepney, whither the East End Londoner resorted on Sundays and holidays to eat Stepney buns and drink ale and cider. Here also the seaman ashore regaled himself and his mistresses with like refreshments. By the London Hospital he would, turning to the right, drive along the New Road through open country. About Ratcliff Highway he would meet with a few houses among orchards and market gardens, till he reached Wapping, with its two or three streets running parallel with the river, crowded with sailors, fishwives, and disreputable women. This maritime piece of London extended from Shadwell Causeway to a little east of the Tower, showing from



a distance all the picturesque features which belong to a busy waterside district. In midstream were many ships—colliers, Dutch galliots, hay boats, and West Indiamen, discharging their varied cargoes into barges, an animated and suggestive sight. But on shore the foul streets were thronged with drunken seamen and scarcely less drunken women, their unkempt hair hanging over their faces, their bosoms bare, or half hidden by a handkerchief, and on their feet long quartered shoes with great buckles, their heedless and immoral lives eventually to end in the great churchyard of St. George, Ratcliff. Each tavern was filled with swearing sailors, some just paid off, a crimp or two and their half-stupid prey, and the streets were muddy and filthy.

Tired, however, of sitting in his carriage, our friend would take boat from Wapping Old Stairs (Thames Tunnel) to Tooley Stairs at the south end of London Bridge. He would pass Horsely Down with its houses, its stairs, and its dock, meeting, it might be, the Lord Mayor in his state barge, doffing his hat to an acquaintance who is on his way down stream, perhaps to Dr. Johnson and Boswell bound on a pleasure trip from Temple Stairs to Greenwich, arguing, as they glide along, on the argonauts and on preaching.<sup>1</sup> He would watch for a moment to see if fishermen from Lambeth had had any luck and had caught a salmon.

The immensity of the modern metropolis has caused its people to forget that in the eighteenth

<sup>1</sup> Boswell's "Life of Johnson," chap. vii. (July 30, 1763).

century London was essentially a riverside town, with all the changing picturesqueness of a tidal shore. To-day the inhabited area has grown to a size out of all proportion to the Thames, but throughout the eighteenth century the river was a conspicuous feature of the town, an important element in the life of the Londoner alike for business and pleasure, constantly in his view, at once an anchorage, a highway, and a pleasure resort. The comparatively small tonnage of ships in those days enabled them to be moored quite up to London Bridge with perfect ease, and from Shadwell upwards the surface of the river was thronged with small boats calling at one or other of the numerous "stairs" on either shore, and passing from bank to bank.

"On either hand,

Like a long wintry forest, groves of masts  
Shot up their spires; the bellying sheet between  
Possess'd the breezy void; the sooty hulk  
Steer'd sluggish on; the splendid barge along  
Row'd, regular, to harmony; around,  
The boat, light skimming, stretch'd its oary wings."<sup>1</sup>

Though regattas were unknown, pleasure boats glided about the river by Vauxhall, Twickenham, and Richmond, and well-to-do people liked on summer afternoons to visit their friends by water, passing from villa to villa, or were rowed about in gay parties, thus obtaining opportunities for the enjoyment of the

<sup>1</sup> Thompson, "The Seasons," Autumn (1730).

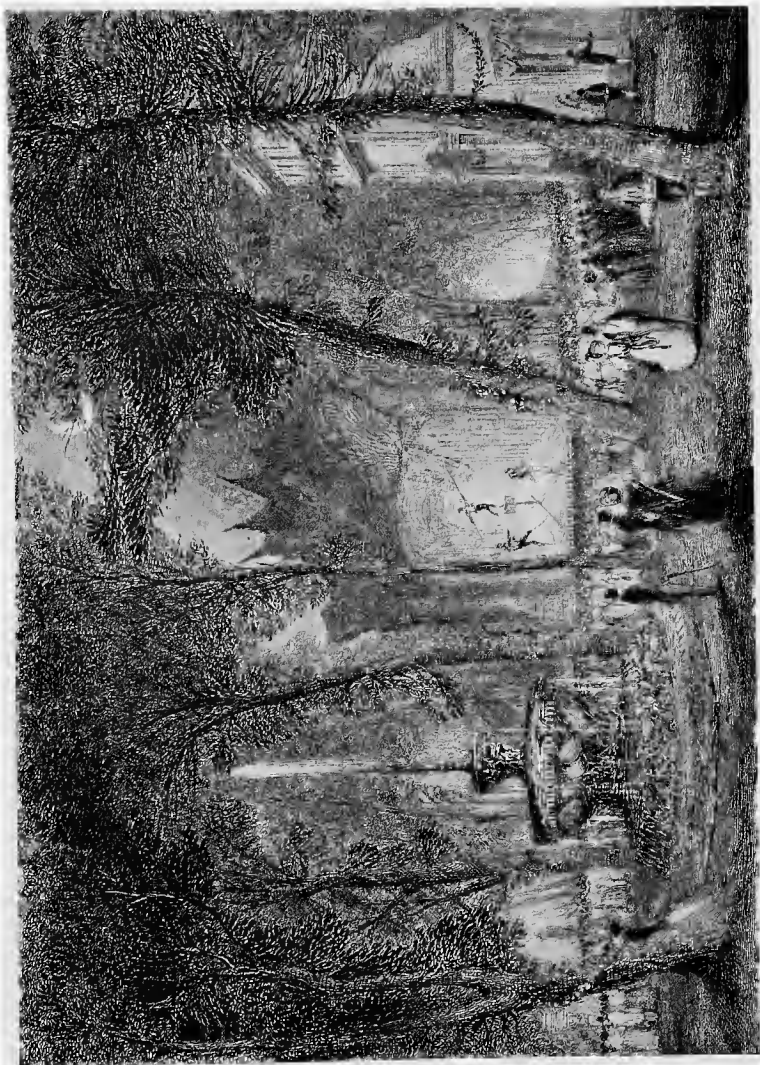
tranquil open-air pleasures which our ancestors valued in their quiet, sensible fashion.

But we must return to our wayfarer. Arrived at his destination on the southern shore, he would drive through the Borough to the beginning of Blackman Street, where he would find himself in the country, here low-lying and unhealthy. He would return through a suburban district to Blackfriars Bridge, and thence proceed over familiar ground, Fleet Street and the Strand, where quaint signs hung from the shops and taverns—to Charing Cross. To the east of St. James's Park with its canal, he would see Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament as they existed till destroyed by fire in 1834. He has come to the group of buildings which connect London with England politically, legally, and ecclesiastically, which more especially emphasize its character as the national capital, and which are the most remarkable links between the century on which our gaze is fixed and a distant past, and an unseen future. The road from the Horse Ferry was the boundary of Westminster, and beyond it were the orchards and market gardens which in those days supplied London with vegetables and fruit. Then driving up Pall Mall and St. James's Street, the end, too, of that part of London on the West—for there were only a few houses, as now, between it and the Green Park—he would have continued along Tyburn Lane (Park Lane), noting, as he passed, the house of the Earls of Dorset—which has been replaced by a magnificent modern mansion—till he

found himself, after having covered a space of some thirteen miles, again at Tyburn turnpike, now quite deserted by the crowds of the morning.

If the visitor—whose imaginary expedition through London we have followed—had chanced to conclude his journey towards evening, he would hardly have failed to hire a boat at Westminster and to visit Vauxhall Gardens or, as they were called up to 1786, the New Spring Garden at Vauxhall,<sup>1</sup> the most famous of the out-of-door pleasure resorts of the eighteenth century. Opened soon after the Restoration—probably in 1661—they remained a popular rendezvous until 1859. In the eighteenth century they were in their zenith, though long before this time they were most attractive to the pleasure-seeker: “Lord!” exclaimed Pepys, when, busy with his official work, he met two handsome women calling on his wife, “to see how my nature could not refrain from the temptation, but I must invite them to go to Foxhall to Spring Gardens!” This was in 1666, and thenceforward all through the succeeding century visitors, from the Prince of Wales to the City apprentice—the entrance fee was only a shilling—from May to September crowded the boxes, the leafy alleys, and the tree-shaded walks. Vauxhall was a mixture of a West End Exhibition of to-day and the Kurhaus Gardens of a German spa. We can scarcely doubt that although an inherent love in English

<sup>1</sup> Warwick Wroth, “The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century,” p. 286,



VAUXHALL GARDENS.



people of fresh air and trees and flowers was one cause of the attraction of Vauxhall as of other out-of-door resorts, that another was the influence throughout the years following the Restoration, the Revolution, and the accession of the Elector, of foreign habits and customs among the more fashionable sections of society. The exiled Cavaliers had learnt in France to appreciate a *plein air* life, the ideal of which we see depicted by Pater and Lancret, while the Dutch soldiers and courtiers set a fashion in England which they had brought with them from Holland.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PEOPLE OF THE CAPITAL

THE Londoner of the eighteenth century was a stay-at-home person. The difficulty and the expense of travelling made it usually impossible for him to pass beyond the villages by which the capital was surrounded—Knightsbridge, Hampstead, Kensington, and Hoxton. A long journey was not often undertaken unless it were absolutely necessary. "A rich citizen of London has perhaps some very valuable relatives or friends in the West; he thinks no more of visiting them than of travelling the deserts of Nubia, which might as well be in the moon, or in Limbo Patrum, considering them as a sort of separate being."<sup>1</sup> Only a few vigorous and specially energetic people made tours for pleasure in England till quite the end of the century. Riding-horses, stage coaches, wagons, and post-chaises, it is true, thronged the roads on every side of London. From the George and Blue Boar in Holborn, eighty-four coaches departed every day. Coaches left for Oxford four days in the week, and for Bristol twice a week. A journey to York occupied thirty hours, and cost

<sup>1</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, vol. xxii. p. 553.



£3 6s. 3d. These are but a few examples of the traffic by road from London which enlivened the main English highways, and the courtyards of the old inns of London and of country towns and villages.

We often think of this form of travelling as pleasant and picturesque, and as an agreeable characteristic of eighteenth-century life, but if we regard it a little more closely we shall realize that it had also an effect on the life and character of the Londoner. It was neither an easy nor a rapid method of travel and, through the difficulty of communication as well as the position of the metropolis in a corner of England, the majority of Londoners were isolated from the rest of England, and were divided somewhat from their countrymen. London in the eighteenth century was in many respects the opposite of what it is to-day. Now it needs more corporate life, less cosmopolitanism, greater municipal individuality; then it was homogeneous, well defined, and proud of its importance as the chief city of Great Britain, yet unembarrassed by a size to which no city had hitherto reached. The Londoner of the eighteenth century, while he cannot be called provincial—for the influence of a widely extended trade, and the effect of the connexion of Great Britain with European politics of which he was constantly hearing, tended to enlarge his mental view—was yet essentially a townsman, and often ignorant of the life of his fellow-countrymen at a distance, whether they lived in town or country.

The most conspicuous and interesting of the dwellers in the metropolis were a number—and a comparatively small number—of men and women who were clustered together in the West End, and who formed the governing class. Politics, and pleasure in various, but rather limited, forms—cards, routs, dinners, and balls—were the occupation of this striking division of English society, the chronicles of which are inscribed in the immortal letters of Horace Walpole and in the gossiping correspondence of George Selwyn and his friends. The nobility, as will be more fully described in a later chapter, were so essential to the government of the country, that from this cause, and from their high and influential social position, they formed the core of this fashionable section, and gave it an aristocratic colour, and something of the tone of an exclusive club. The relations of all those who belonged to it were personal, often intimate. Lively Lady Sarah Lennox, for instance, writes about her political friends as naturally as of the women of her family. The same feature is constantly apparent in Walpole's correspondence. In a letter to Mason, in 1778, he first tells a story of his new housemaid and of her late mistress, the wife of the Bishop of Worcester, then he passes to a lawsuit as to Lord Foley's will, concluding by an historical dissertation on the war with the American Colonies and a half-humorous and half-despairing summary of the political situation—"unless sudden inspiration should seize the whole

island, and make it with one voice invite Dr. Franklin to come over and new model the Government, it will crumble away in the hands that still hold it. They feel, they own, their insufficiency. Everybody is sensible of it, and everybody seems to think, like Lady Melbourne, that if we are blown up, it will be very comical.”<sup>1</sup>

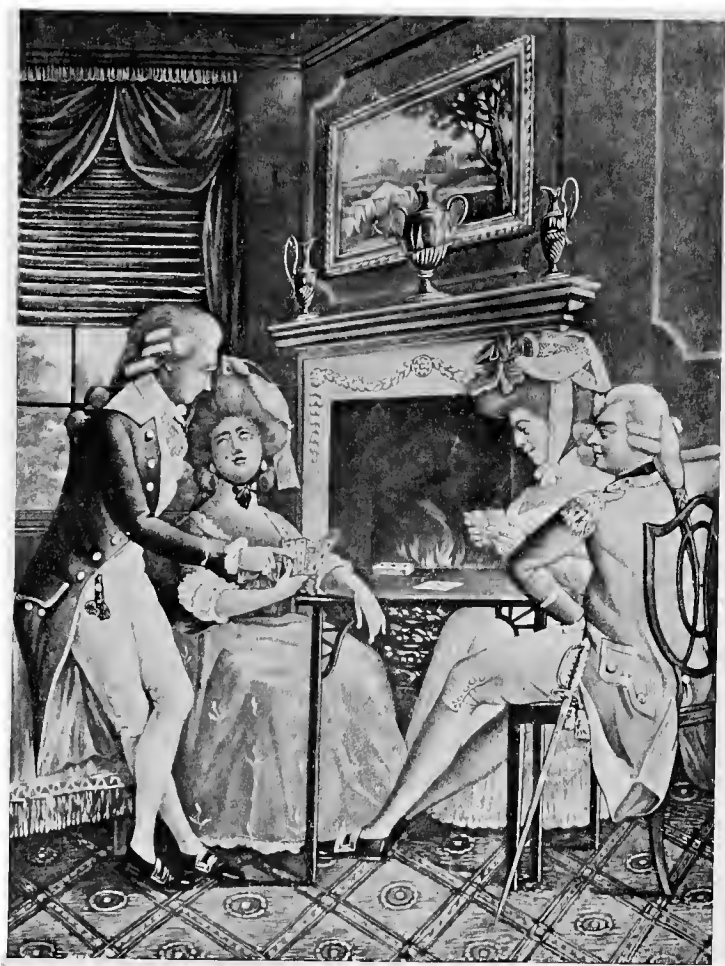
The people who comprised this important division were distinct from the rest of the inhabitants of the capital, who, whether merchants in the City, or lawyers and doctors outside of it, were regarded with something like contempt by this particular society, a contempt which was exaggerated by their women folk, who threw up their heads and made rude remarks about ladies who were not of the *ton*. Selfish but good-natured, sensible and worldly, this section did not trouble itself about the past, or disturb itself about the future; marriages and deaths, the last debate, the next appointment, or a recent scandal alike interested it, it lived in and for the present. Politics and pleasure were daily and closely intermingled—“the blue and buff junto meet in St. James’s Street to fix upon their plan of operations for to-morrow,”<sup>2</sup> wrote Storer, a man about town, to Lord Carlisle, a month after the news of the disaster of York Town reached London in the autumn of 1781. This is a simple sentence, it is, however, singularly suggestive. We see the Whig leaders meeting in

<sup>1</sup> “Letters of Walpole” (edited by Toynbee), vol. x. p. 239.

<sup>2</sup> “George Selwyn, His Letters and His Life,” p. 165.

Charles Fox's rooms in St. James's Street, where some of the company have been engrossed in faro or hazard, whilst others have come from a chat at Brooks's or White's. In fact, gambling and politics were largely conducted in one street in the West End of the town, and political campaigns were planned where men lost their thousands on the green table. In many respects, too, this section of society was more closely in touch with the country than with the City at the very time when it formed a striking element in London life. This difference between the City and the West End makes more apparent the diminishing political power of the former, the influence of which was now becoming more purely commercial. The conjunction in the West End of statesmen, noblemen, men of letters, and men of pleasure, great ladies, and giddy women of fashion, commenced in the reign of Anne; its end began when Lord Grey passed the Reform Bill of 1832, when the exclusiveness of the governing and fashionable section was broken by the invasion of the middle-class politician, and of the City magnate, whose advent on the political scene had been emphasized by the coming of the wealthy Nabob in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Another section, different from the great body of average Londoners, comprised a number of middle-class men and women, some well-to-do and even rich, generally unostentatious, appreciative of comfort, but more appreciative still of brightness of mind



THE CARD PARTY.

*About 1780*



and clever conversation, resulting in agreeable and delightful intercourse. This group has been portrayed for us by Fanny Burney in her Diary, and she has handed down a memorable gallery, Johnson, Burke, Mrs. Thrale, and Mrs. Montague, Mr. Crisp, and Mr. Thrale, the Lockes of Norbury Park, and her own family in which the active, intelligent, and cosmopolitan Dr. Burney is a striking and an attractive figure.

Literature was the bond of union among them, while in the gatherings at young Slaughter's Coffee House in St. Martin's Lane, science was predominant. "Bentley belonged to a club which met every Wednesday at young Slaughter's Coffee House in St. Martin's Lane. It bore no distinctive title, though frequented by men of real science and distinguished merit. John Hunter, the great anatomist, was at one time its chairman. Sir Joseph Banks, Solander, Sir C. Blagden, Dr. George Fordyce, Milne, Maskelyne, Captain Cook, Sir G. Shuckburgh, Lord Mulgrave, Smeaton, Ramsden, Griffith the publisher, and many others were or had been members. Edgeworth and Wedgwood generally attended its meetings as guests when in town. Researches and discoveries were discussed, and lengthened arguments, differences, and agreements were always crowned by a supper, which after January 3, 1775, was eaten off a special service of cream ware, supplied by Wedgwood, and probably a gift."<sup>1</sup> But the fashionable and governing class

<sup>1</sup> "Meteyard, Life of Wedgwood," vol. ii. p. 418

cared or knew little about these groups, and did not perceive how important they were as factors in the evolution of the English people.

The ordinary Londoner of the eighteenth century was the type of the Englishman as he appeared to foreigners, and as he has remained to this day ; from him Arbuthnot drew his sketch of John Bull in his famous satire, "Law is a Bottomless Pit." He was sensible and unemotional, honest and coarse-minded, clear-headed and persevering ; in his religion and his politics he was practical and independent—"un Anglais, comme homme libre, va au ciel par le chemin qui lui plaît," wrote Voltaire in his "Lettres Philosophiques." He had no ambitions, and his creed was summed up in the phrase that he tried to do his duty in the station in which he had been placed. Piety, prudence, courage, and honesty were, we read on the quaint monument in St. Helen's, Bishopsgate Street, to Martin Bond citizen and soldier, and captain of the trained bands of the City in 1588, the marked qualities of the typical citizen. They were those which predominated among the merchants of London in the eighteenth century, who were the backbone of the population. Their piety was unquestionably superficial from the point of view of subjective religion, but the practical fruits of it are visible in the numerous benefactions of which the walls of the City churches bear record, and the muniments of the City Companies give abundant evidence.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The records of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, for instance, show



The characteristics of the Londoner are reflected in the philosophical and the religious works of his age, from which, rather than from individuals, Voltaire and Rousseau have drawn their pictures of the Englishman. For two centuries and a half England, and London its capital, had passed through momentous constitutional changes, had influenced the course of continental affairs, and had had commercial relations with most parts of the globe. The London merchant, homely and unassuming, had nevertheless a fixed and undemonstrative pride and a confidence in himself and in his city which arose from considerable achievements and from a state of individual freedom.

But the tradesman—well-to-do as he might be—was narrow-minded and vulgar. He tried to imitate those of a higher position, and to be seen at the same places of amusement. Lord Orville and the Braughtons are types, depicted by Fanny Burney, of the cultivated nobleman, and of tradespeople from Snow Hill; each went to Vauxhall, and each could go to the Opera, just as all classes could go to an execution or to a theatre. But imitation could give the shopkeeper the superficial polish of the nobleman, or the breadth of view and the experience of life of the merchant.

Young men came up to London in the eighteenth century. On the north wall is a tablet telling how Francis Bancroft (1727) gave all his property in London and Middlesex to the Drapers' Company for the purposes of charity and education. These instances might be multiplied.

century as they had for generations, but in numbers so small as to make little impression on the general body of town-born citizens, for the country gentleman, whether nobleman or squire, had almost ceased to send his younger sons to seek their fortunes in the City. "It is without possibility of dispute that the City was no longer recruited from the class called gentry; that the number of 'gentlemen,' using the old sense of the word, who held office in the City, was extremely small; that, for causes which can be explained, it was not only possible, but common, for quite poor lads to succeed in business and to amass great fortunes." But poor lads had always been able to come to the front in the City of London, and in this passage we are not told why the son of the merchant, or, as often as not, of the small shopkeeper, was taking a larger share in the commerce of London, and strengthening a class which has had special characteristics down to our own day. The true causes were the increasing size of the standing army, the popularity, in spite of its hardships, of the navy, and the numerous opportunities given to the younger sons of the nobility and gentry to realize their ambitions in military or naval service. The victories of Marlborough gave immense popularity and *éclat* to military life, and from the death of William III. to the day of Waterloo, there was, year after year, constant employment for the young Englishman in the army or the navy, employment which in a day might make his name famous from Edinburgh to London. And so he was

withdrawn from commerce, the commerce which had been patronized by Prince Rupert, who had been one of the founders of the Hudson's Bay Company, and also by statesmen. Robert Harley was a director of the South Sea Company, the shares of which had been squabbled over in the royal ante-rooms at Kensington Palace. Consequently the Londoner who made his livelihood in the City was born, educated, lived, and died within the sound of Bow Bells.

The infant who was born into the world in the eighteenth century was—if life were worth living—fortunate if he survived to boyhood. Maitland put the mortality of children five years of age or under at forty-seven per cent. Besant, taking the registers of St. Botolph, Bishopsgate, for his data, but for a few years only, states that the proportion in that parish was fifty-nine per cent.<sup>1</sup> These figures may not be altogether accurate, but they show sufficiently clearly the dangers which surrounded child-life from the accumulated effects of “bad air, bad drainage, and bad food,” and, we may very well add, unskilful medical advice and complete ignorance of methods of nursing. The good old times in London were, indeed, fatal to human life, as can well be realized by a comparison of the figures of the Institute of Actuaries. According to the tables of this body to-day, out of 100,000 who are born, 38,124 are alive at the age of seventy. According to Maitland's figures in the

<sup>1</sup> Besant, “London in the Eighteenth Century,” p. 382.

eighteenth century, there were but 13,000, and according to the register of St. Botolph 14,571.

If the chances either of attaining to boyhood or of living to old age were against the Londoner, the possibilities of obtaining a good education were not much greater. A boy of well-to-do parents had open to him one of the public schools—St. Paul's, Charterhouse, Christ's Hospital, Merchant Taylors', the City of London, or, outside London proper, Westminster. But if a parent could not send his son to one of these great foundations, his children might perhaps be taught at a charity school attached to a parish. Outside these schools<sup>1</sup> elementary, horn-book or dame schools were to be found in different parts of London, and for higher education private schools, from the academies carried on by broken-down craftsmen to the more pretentious establishment belonging to some clergyman who had taken a degree at a university. If, however, a boy had learned to read, to write a good hand, and understand arithmetic, he had done well, for "the middle-class education was principally carried on in 'academies' kept by men, broken-down, bankrupt, or turned out of some other employment. The master could teach nothing more than writing

<sup>1</sup> According to Maitland (vol. ii. p. 277), there were (1772) 37 free schools—which included the great foundations of St. Paul's and Westminster—containing 3,173 scholars. The parish and other schools sustained by voluntary contributions were—boys' schools 75, girls' 53; some of these were both for the education of boys and girls, and were not separate. They contained 3,458 boys and 1,901 girls.

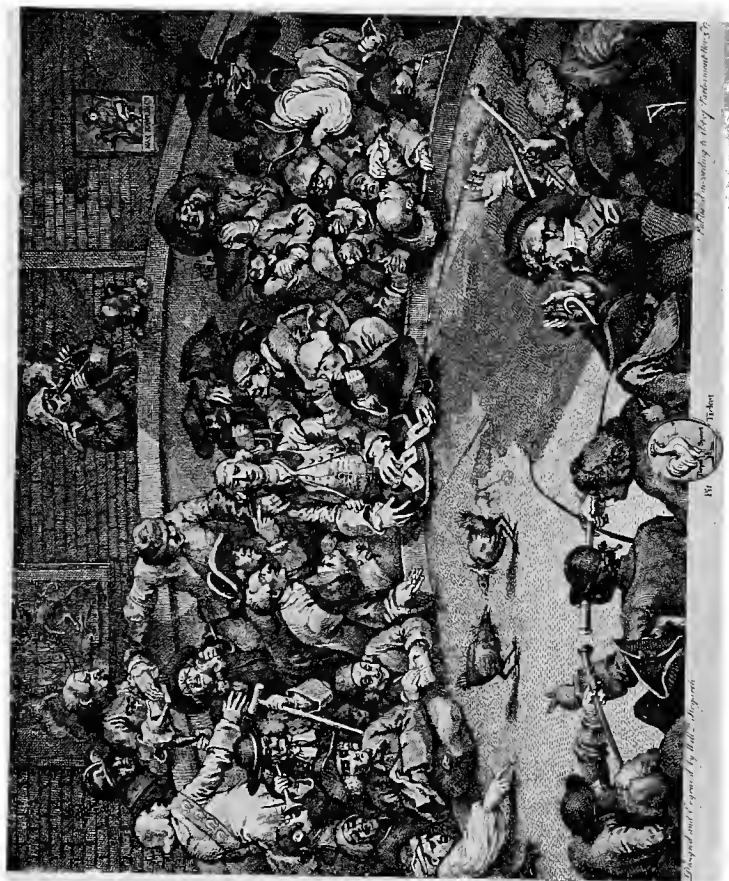
and arithmetic; he could also hear lessons learned by rote; he pretended to teach French, and had a Swiss retained on the establishment; needless to say that the boys learned no more French in the eighteenth century than they do at present. The usher taught Latin to those boys who learned it; there was also a dancing-master on his staff."

We have noted how high was the mortality, it follows that from the moment that a young man began his life's work in London, whether it were professional, commercial, or manual, he might well look forward to a much briefer span of existence than the Londoner of to-day, an existence unvaried, simple, and rather brutal. The Londoner of the eighteenth century was indeed an elemental person. The objects of past political contests from century to century had been for individual freedom, and most men had at this time no abstract views about patriotism or human rights; they wanted only to be allowed to go their own way without hindrance from king or parliament, bishop or nonconformist preacher. Little disturbed by the central administration, by the middle of the eighteenth century this freedom had been to a great extent obtained. The Londoner could eat, drink, work, play, and pray, much as he liked, and his likings, as was natural, were somewhat gross—sensitive-ness, delicacy, often decency, were qualities which he did not possess.

The characteristics of the people were shown in their amusements. They loved anything in the nature of

combat, though at this time they seldom joined in it themselves ; physical training, asceticism for the purpose of fitting men to take part in athletic contests, systematic participation in games which required prolonged exertion, were unknown. The Londoner, however, showed in a rudimentary form a liking for outdoor pleasures ; but the fact that they were of an unorganized and holiday kind has caused this trait to be somewhat overlooked. " Many of the citizens," says a contemporary writer, " take delight in sailing, rowing, swimming, and fishing in the river Thames, whilst others in the circumjacent fields, bowling-greens, etc., divert themselves with horse and foot races, riding, leaping, wrestling, cricket, archery, cudgels, coits, bowling, skittles, ninepins, and bull and bear baiting."<sup>1</sup> This is a goodly list, and shows that large numbers in one way or another partook of physical exercise. Though the Thames was thronged with boats, they were generally rowed by watermen ; towards the end of the century here and there an amateur would walk a match for a wager. In the winter, if there were sufficient frost, skaters, chiefly of the more fashionable class, could be seen on the ornamental waters, and driving was the hobby of young men who would now have their hunters, their racehorses, or their grouse moors. Sir John Lade, quite at the end of the century, was a famous whip, and instructed the Prince of Wales in the way to handle a team ; but driving as a sporting

<sup>1</sup> Maitland, " History of London," (1772), vol. ii. p. 1327.



THE COCK PIT.





art was not the amusement of the middle-class Londoner.

A common manner in which the love of combat could be gratified was by witnessing cock-fighting, cockpits indeed were to be found all over London.<sup>1</sup> It was a national sport, in which men of all degrees delighted. There was a particularly famous cockpit behind Gray's Inn, another in Drury Lane, which the apprentices of London, by way of a quiet amusement on Shrove Tuesday, annually wrecked. If any more ferocious manner of gratifying this instinct could be found, it was not neglected, and animal suffering added to the pleasure of the afternoon. Fighting with fists, single-sticks, quarter-staffs, or broad-swords was common; and if the combatants were sparing of their blood, "blasphemy, cursing, and reviling" were heard; if, however, "they hack and hue one another pretty heartily, insomuch that the stage runs with their gore, nothing can be more satisfactory to the spectators, who are then generally sure to reward them very bountifully."<sup>2</sup>

As men grow older, they desire tranquil pastimes, which generally means being only spectators. The amusements I have described were suited to youths, young men, and men in the prime of life. The basis of them was an almost unrestrained and fundamental love of ferocious combat; for all of

<sup>1</sup> Sydney, "England and the English in the Eighteenth Century," vol. i. p. 177.

<sup>2</sup> "The Brief and Merry History of Great Britain."

these amusements combat was an essential part. Oftentimes in the streets among the common people "assailants begin with running against each other head foremost like rams, and afterwards come to boxing." Then a ring is formed and people run out of their shops—just as to-day they gather round a disabled motor. Yet in all this brutality there was a sense of fair play and of justice and the rules of the game must be observed. The Londoner, in fact, enjoyed without affectation the amusements which pleased a nature in which we see the fierce qualities of his Northern forefathers combined with a sense of justice which had become characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon race.

The moment that one perceives these particular qualities combined with ample individual freedom, so that full play could be given to them, the basis of the social state of London in the eighteenth century becomes clear. Filthy streets, noisome prisons and mad-houses, unconcealed vice, were the results of this combination of character and circumstance. To a high-minded despot much that was then common in London would have been intolerable, and would unquestionably have been swept away with a high hand; but the Londoner had attained to a state of individual freedom without having yet learnt to seek for methods by which society or his city should be made cleaner and purer.

From necessity, rather than from choice, the Londoner took the air in a leisurely and unexciting fashion, but in his own way he had more open-air pleasures

than those who have come after him, for London and its outskirts were bright with gardens. In the evening at Ranelagh and Vauxhall he could see men such as Fanny Burney has depicted in *Lord Orville* and Sir Clement Willoughby, as well as his own friends from Holborn and Cheapside. With these resorts must be grouped Marylebone Gardens, and Cupers Gardens on the Surrey side of the Thames. These four were the resorts of rank and fashion as well as of more humble folk. The entrance fee was small, and their popularity arose very much because they provided concerts and spectacles, fêtes and dancing; from May to September in fine weather they were extraordinarily crowded.

A second group of gardens afforded simpler pleasures and less aristocratic company. These were attached to the medical wells—Islington Spa, Bagnigge, Pancras Wells,<sup>1</sup> and many others, to which persons were drawn from mixed motives—from a wish to improve their health, and to enjoy fresh air and various quiet amusements, a ramble in the maze, perhaps a game of bowls or of skittles. If the Londoner were in a domestic mood he could take his wife and children to a tea-garden, and have his tea in an arbour, as Morland has depicted him, perhaps to the White Conduit House, where cricket of an embryonic kind could be played when he chose; or to the Three Hats, in Islington, a favourite Sunday resort, one

<sup>1</sup> Warwick Wroth, "The London Pleasure Gardens of the Eighteenth Century," pp. 15, 56, 123.

made more lively on weekdays, for a large part of the last half of the century, by a band of music and equestrian performances. And there was Hornsey if he wanted to go quite out of town. In fact he had an ample choice of resorts on both sides of the Thames. Gambling was not unknown at some of these places, and disreputable women occasionally found admittance, but generally in the pleasure gardens of the eighteenth century the Londoner was at his best; husbands, wives, and children, young men and maidens, friends arm-in-arm, there enjoyed life in a simple and natural manner without excitement, satisfied with the good that providence had provided. Sometimes the brutality of the age showed itself even at the tea-gardens, especially in the cruel and childish amusement which was known as duck-hunting.

To the citizen the pleasure gardens of London were of great importance. Difficulties and expense of travel prevented movement from place to place, and so for him they were at once seaside and Alps, trout stream and golf links; they represented almost entirely in this age the out-of-door existence of men of every calling—the merchant, the lawyer, the small tradesman.

Wherever the Londoner went he went staidly, in a stiff dress. The result of his inertia was an absence of a knowledge of rural life and of landscape; it made the ordinary aspects of the country unfamiliar and even extraordinary, and it is from this fact that we find the almost ludicrous descriptions in diaries and correspondence of natural features which to-day

the Londoner would scarcely notice. Dr. Johnson, who was a typical Londoner, regarded the Hawkstone Hills in Shropshire much as a city clerk might to-day look upon the High Alps. Under the circumstances of the age Johnson's tour to the Hebrides was certainly remarkable, a quite astonishing feat of travel for a Londoner, who was most at home in Fleet Street.

Yet the Englishman has ever had a love of the country, the result of village life, of the character of his land,—its quiet beauty, and its homely aspect. Rural life is praised alike by Herrick and Cowper; but in the literature of the eighteenth century love of form concealed a genuine liking for nature. London, small as it was compared with the London of to-day, had already developed into a great city, with the features of a capital, and its inhabitant was essentially a townsman. But a growing appreciation of the country among townsmen is perceptible not only in the Londoner's liking for his tea-gardens, many of which appealed to him by their rural charm, but in the pleasure found by some of the nobility and upper middle-class in suburban and Thames-side villas, showing that under all the formalism and artificiality of the eighteenth century there existed a love of fields and flowers and of the changing delights of nature.

It was towards the end of the century that the man of business began to live in the West End, sometimes to own a cottage in the rural districts close to the metropolis in what are now parts of the town or its suburbs. The town-houses of the Londoner began also to surround

the mansions of noblemen—Powis House in Great Ormond Street, Burlington House, Leicester House, Dorchester House, which had hitherto been almost country-houses, bearing some resemblance to places such as Osterley Park is to-day, and Holland House was to the men of the 'thirties. This change had many results ; among others it lessened the attendance at the City churches, which I notice here because this falling-off in the size of the congregations has been mistaken for an indication of a less religious spirit in London. It tended also to destroy the homogeneity of the City, except as a business centre, and to minimize the differences which existed between the citizens proper and those who came from the west side of Temple Bar. The City man, whether in a large or a small business, unless he were a member of Parliament, or held some exceptional position, was regarded as an intruder outside his own haunts. To this exclusiveness the movement westwards helped to put an end.

The possession of a villa, whether it was Mr. Thrale's, near the quiet village of Streatham, or Sir Joshua's at Richmond, or Garrick's at Hampton, showed a love of quiet, and of country life not too distant from the centre of national affairs. Lord Chesterfield owned a villa at Blackheath—to-day the last place in the world one would fix on for a rural retreat—which he called Babiole, in compliment to his French friend Madame de Monconseil, where he cultivated melons and pineapples with something

akin to enthusiasm.<sup>1</sup> These houses were not merely suburban dwellings; they occupied the place of the country-houses of to-day, which are quickly reached from London, are convenient for week-end visits, and for long stays in late summer and autumn. The gardens by which they were surrounded were, it is true, often disfigured by artificial ornaments of a pseudo-classical style, faint imitations of the extraordinary collection of temples, alcoves, and statuary which were dotted over the immense pleasure-grounds of Stowe. Still, appreciation of nature, which has always appealed to the English man and woman, was the basis of the taste for these pleasure-houses and grounds, which were especially attractive when they were situated on the banks of the Thames.

<sup>1</sup> Ernst, "Life of Lord Chesterfield," p. 370.

## CHAPTER III

### SOME RESORTS AND CEREMONIES OF THE CAPITAL

To the men of London the coffee-houses, uncomfortable though they were, with their wooden partitions and often narrow passages, were of greater importance than the pleasure-gardens, which were described in the last, though strictly they belong to this chapter. The West End beau, the merchant, the lawyer, and the shopkeeper, each had his favourite coffee-house ; it was the exchange, the club, the circulating library, the modern man's daily paper ; it touched almost every social and business want. From their number—in the first quarter of the century there were more than two thousand—and from the manner in which they met many demands of a generation which, intellectually and commercially, was growing more and more active within the bounds of eighteenth-century limitations, the London coffee-houses occupy a place which has given them unique historical importance. If the Londoner were a divine he could talk over the latest sermon of Clarke or of Romaine at Truby's or Child's in St. Paul's Churchyard, while the lawyer discussed the decisions in Westminster Hall, at Nando's in Inner Temple Lane, or at the





A TEA GARDEN (BAGNIGGE WELLS).



Grecian in Devereux Court. George's coffee-house, a little to the west of Temple Bar, was patronized not only by Templars, but by many others. "My company," writes Shenstone, in 1739, "goes to George's Coffee-house, where for that small subscription (one shilling) I read all pamphlets under a three-shilling dimension, and indeed any larger ones would not be fit for coffee-house perusal."<sup>1</sup> Authors, actors, dramatic amateurs, and wits could be seen at the Bedford, beneath the piazza of Covent Garden; indeed, if one had walked through London in those days one would have constantly met with some coffee-house which had its particular set of patrons, where the attraction was not so much the twopenny dish of tea or coffee as the opportunity of meetings for the purpose either of pleasure or of business.

At Lloyd's coffee-house, which, in 1692, was transferred from Tower Street to Lombard Street, ship-owners and merchants used to assemble.<sup>2</sup> It was there that the famous Lloyd's List first was published and sold. "Subscriptions," it was headed, "are taken in at three shillings a quarter at the bar of Lloyd's coffee-house in Lombard Street," and it was there also that the system of private underwriting of vessels, as opposed to the business of the London Insurance and the Royal Exchange Corporations, was carried on and developed. The insurance business transacted at Lloyd's coffee-house was transferred to the Royal

<sup>1</sup> "Works, Edition (1769)," vol. iii. p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Martin, "History of Lloyd's and Marine Insurance," p. 62.

Exchange in 1754, and the results of the gatherings inside its homely walls are visible to-day wherever commerce extends, while its history affords perhaps the most striking example of the fact that these places of entertainment were patronized from no idle fashion of the time. They supplied a real want, and they disappeared, not because men were tired of them, but because society had outgrown them and, whether mercantile or fashionable, had discovered more convenient means of supplying its several wants.

Of the coffee-house, the lounge, a term well understood in the eighteenth century, was the child, a clearly defined type of the time, who, without these establishments, could never have existed. In our own day most of us have known the frequenter of clubs, the man always to be found in some particular room, but he is neither one of a type nor of a class. For he may be a billiard, or a bridge, player, a student or a raconteur. But the eighteenth-century loungers strolled, or went in a coach, from one coffee-house to another. "They shift from coffee-houses and chocolate-houses from hour to hour, to get over the insupportable labour of doing nothing."<sup>1</sup> They did not remain in one house, but the news which they picked up in the West End they carried to Temple Bar, and from Temple Bar to St. Paul's Churchyard, as they went disseminating and gathering information and gossip on every subject which interested the town. They were at once talkers and listeners, leisurely, intelligent,

<sup>1</sup> *Spectator*, No. 54.

blessed with means of livelihood without labour, and never leaving London except for a short visit to Bath or Tunbridge Wells. The loungers begin and end as a class with the century, and they belong to it wholly in temperament, in manners, and in mode of life.

An avidity for news and for criticisms of social and political events helped to supply the coffee-houses with customers, and newspapers with readers. "Many a man," said Johnson, "who enters the coffee-house in his nightgown and slippers is called away to his shop or his dinner before he has well considered the state of Europe." An increasing desire for something fresher and larger than the slow newsletter was ministered to most effectively when Defoe, with his extraordinary insight into public opinion, started his Review. Other sheets, such for example as the *Daily Courant*, issued in 1702, and which was the first English daily paper,<sup>1</sup> and the *Post Boy*, met the same need.<sup>2</sup> The newspaper tax of 1712 did not prevent the multiplication of journals, and in 1776 the number of newspapers published in London had risen to fifty-three.

The arrangements for their distribution were imperfect, and most persons found it cheapest and quickest to peruse them in a coffee-house, which often enabled the reader to comment on them to a friend, or to argue with a neighbour on the state of affairs,

<sup>1</sup> Grant, "The Newspaper Press," vol. i. p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Fox Bourne, "English Newspapers," vol. i. pp. 56, 68.

a piquant addition—some might think—to the perusal of the news of the day. This desire for information and the consequent supply of journals, combined with the need for association for the purpose of business or pleasure, produced these innumerable coffee-houses with their varied purposes, where we perceive very clearly the forces which underlay the daily life of the Londoner.

Nearly every important provincial town had its one newspaper, but in London only was there a constant current of news from all parts of the world, conducing and ministering to a mental activity in singular contrast to the political apathy which predominated, in spite of European wars, until the end of the century.

The taverns of a town have usually been a noticeable feature of the social life of the time; but many of those of London in the eighteenth century are remarkable because they were the complement of the coffee-houses, and gave opportunities for association of a general character, supplementary to their use as mere eating-houses. The Londoner, whether he were a politician at the West End, a man of letters in Fleet Street, a merchant in Bishopsgate Street, or a tradesman in Cornhill, was almost certain to belong to one or more clubs which met at some tavern. The Brothers' Club—which in the beginning of the century was brought into being by Bolingbroke and Swift—dined at Ozinda's, in St. James's Street. Incidents in Johnson's life also illustrate this feature

of the age—his creation of the Ivy Lane Club in 1746, at the King's Head in Ivy Lane, and of *The Club*, with Reynolds, in 1764, which, commencing at the Turk's Head in Gerrard Street, moved in turn to various taverns in the West End. At the end of his life Johnson inaugurated a small evening club at the Essex Head in Essex Street.

In fact, the Londoner, especially in the first half of the eighteenth century, passed a large part of his time in coffee-houses and taverns, and when one sought him after midday he would often be found in a tavern. No habit was so universal in every class as this of association in some place of entertainment ; it was part of the life alike of the nobleman and of the tradesman. While the former enjoyed himself in one of the numerous houses in the West End, the latter was surrounded by his business rivals and his business friends at the Globe Tavern in Fleet Street, at the Sixpenny Card Club, or at the Free-and-Easy at the Queen's Arms in St. Paul's Churchyard. But when we go with the Londoner to his coffee-house or tavern we should think of him rather than of the place, for coffee-house and tavern were each only a building which, by reason of its existence, was the most convenient for the purpose of meetings, whether for business or for pleasure. The important fact is the remarkable and constant and informal association of men of like interests, tastes, or occupations for purposes political, commercial, literary, or social. These associations, every one of which was usually

called a club, even if it were without rules or officers, sprang rapidly into being from the beginning of the century, so rapidly that places by no means always suitable had to be used for their meetings. Frequently those who came together assembled around a dinner table. An Englishman, it is said, must celebrate any event by a dinner ; perhaps this custom has been exaggerated, it is at any rate a national characteristic. The Londoner of the eighteenth century had to meet his friends and associates within doors, and it was quite in accordance with the people and with the age that they should take a hearty meal together. The assembly dined about two o'clock, then as the century advanced the hour grew later. But whatever the time, the table was the place where a man could most conveniently meet with those of like mind or interest with himself. But the numerous associations in coffee-houses and taverns for every conceivable purpose could not have taken place except in a city where there was complete individual freedom, an entire absence of governmental suspicion or supervision, and where, in spite of class differences, men of different grades and occupations consorted without ceremony. The political clubs of the age of Anne brought together men of the highest and lowest birth ; the Duke of Ormond sat at the same table with John Gay, who had once been a silkmercer's apprentice. *The Club*, which Dr. Johnson established in 1764, was equally marked by its tone of social equality. Though the City man was to some



extent looked at with disdain by the beau from St. James's Street, there was in London in the eighteenth century a greater association between men of all degrees than in any other city at this period in any other country in the world. The modern democratic spirit is perceptible amidst divisions of rank, beneath the ceremonious phrases, the differences of dress, and the external appellations of the men who were gathered within the metropolis from St. James's Street to the Royal Exchange. In the meetings in the coffee-house and the tavern is especially visible the growth in this age not only of the democratic spirit, but of increasing mental activity,—of the various forces which go to make up life as we understand it in these days.

The theatre was the chief indoor place of amusement where all classes met, and it was only at the theatre that human passions and the tragedy and comedy of life could be studied, for the novel had not yet supplied men and women with an inexhaustible mass of imaginative literature, dealing alike with romantic and with commonplace lives. Indeed, even if books and newspapers had been abundant, the possibilities of reading at those times when the modern Londoner chiefly enjoys it, in the short and dark winter days, were small. In the eighteenth century, London was a city of darkness. It was the absence of powerful artificial illuminants that made the Londoner of every class an early riser, which forced him to his bed at an equally early hour—depriving him not a

little of the pleasure of reading when he had most leisure for it—and made the streets unsafe after dark. It was not till the beginning of the nineteenth century (1807–1810) that the use of gas was introduced for the purpose of lighting streets and houses. Before 1736 London was only lit from Michaelmas to Lady Day, and then only until midnight and on nights when there was no moon.<sup>1</sup> A more systematic manner of lighting then came into force, but as compared with modern methods it was intolerably bad. Living in days when darkness can be dispelled in a moment, we can scarcely realise the plight of the Londoner, especially in winter, when the short day had come to an end. His only resource was an early departure to his bed, for the absence of light checked the interchange of society, and prejudiced rational amusements; it tended to mental ignorance and to social disorder, and it was a strong barrier to the improvement not only of the London streets, but of the general condition of the Londoner. Light, indeed, has been one of the most beneficent influences of later times, and its increase within and without the buildings of London has done not a little to mark the distinctions between the eighteenth and the succeeding centuries.

If the Londoner was coarse-minded, brutal in some of his tastes, and illiterate, he was at any rate outwardly religious; but in his religion, as in politics and

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, "History of England in the Eighteenth Century," vol. i, p. 486.

business, he was practical and unemotional ; he had a dislike of Popery, which he regarded as the cause of not a few of the constitutional disturbances which culminated in the Revolution, and of the disagreeable uncertainty which agitated the kingdom before the death of Queen Anne. He went to church not only on Sundays but also on week-days. Out of the one hundred and eleven churches in London in 1733, forty-four had a daily service, in most instances both in the morning and the evening, while in some churches there were more than this number. One hundred and twenty congregations of Nonconformists worshipped in their own fashion. The churches were, with the exception of those in Southwark, Westminster, and the parts immediately adjacent to the City, actually in the City itself, and the merchant or the draper walked with his family from his home in Lombard Street or Wood Street to and from St. Bartholomew's or St. Botolph's.

In few of the London churches was an organ to be heard. They were filled with ugly pews dominated by a high pulpit, from which a divine preached an unimpassioned sermon to a congregation which regarded church-going as one of the recognized proprieties of existence. The London clergyman was well paid and well read in his own subject, and was often the holder of a degree in divinity ; he represented the scholarly divine of the eighteenth century who discoursed to his audience with a large proportion of abstract reasoning and common sense. He had,

says Leslie Stephen, "to stock the ordinary mind with a due provision of common-sense maxims which might serve to keep its proprietor out of mischief and make him a respectable member of society." The eighteenth century was unspiritual; emotional religion, an intercourse between a personal Deity and humanity, were entirely foreign to the minds alike of preacher and congregation. Preacher and layman in London were equally satisfied with the existing order of things. Theological reasoning was intended to reconcile religious theories with the Church as it then existed, and the worthy merchant who lived a sober, charitable, and not too profane existence might well regard himself as on the high road to salvation. He was a person worthy of imitation, and the occupant of the City pulpit, when he left questions of theology, was far from reproaching the sinfulness of the world in general and of his congregation in particular. Rather he desired that his flock should follow the example of the most respected of its members, and lead an honest and respectable life creditable to citizens of no mean city.

Enthusiasm was so much suspected that in discussions on the principles and grounds of religious belief—discussions raising ethical questions which were argued in a language often scarcely comprehensible to the ordinary layman—the vitality of religion was lost, and the whole mental atmosphere of the men of the time became more and more tranquil. The Londoner, untroubled by thoughts of a Popish

prince and of a religion of which he was afraid, with Churchmen and Nonconformists comparatively at peace, found the political and social characteristics of the time accentuated both in his church and in his meeting-house.

The conventionalism which is so marked a feature in the religious observances of the age is especially visible in marriage ceremonies. They were an odd mixture of superficial religion and revelry. There must be a religious ceremony; whether it were performed by a broken-down parson in a tavern off Fleet Street, or by a divine in a West End church, was immaterial. The idea of anything in the nature of a sacrament, of any divine binding of human ties, was wholly absent. Fleet marriages, it has been said, prevailed, partly from a desire to save expense, as special licences were costly, and partly because banns were regarded as coarse; but the latter reason does not accord with innumerable features of the Londoner's daily life, and he did not begrudge his money on the festivities at home, which lasted for two or three days. The true reason was the attitude of the Londoner towards religious rites, which he regarded only as necessary formalities. Fleet marriages were ended by Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, which required that a marriage should be preceded either by the publication of banns for three Sundays, or by the issue of a licence, which could not in the case of minors be granted without the consent of parents or guardians. The Act put an end to innumerable scandals—the

marriage in taverns and public-houses of men who were so drunk that they were married without their knowledge, and the clandestine taking away of young girls; but it also terminated a practice which was undoubtedly found convenient by all classes of the community. Nearly three thousand Fleet marriages had, it was shown by a Parliamentary return, occurred in four months, and one Fleet parson had married a hundred and seventy-three couples in a day.<sup>1</sup> Allowing for sham and fraudulent marriages, the number of these ceremonies was in excess of anything which could have been caused by fraud and debauchery alone. The Act increased morality, improved society, altered fundamentally the conditions necessary for the validity of a marriage, and destroyed a travesty of a religious ceremony. It did not, however, make the Londoner more sincerely religious.

More serious ideas of the marriage ceremony must be dated from the religious reaction which began with the preaching of Wesley and Whitefield, and which produced the evangelical revival in the Church of England after the middle of the century, though its effects on the general body of the inhabitants of London were not visible for many years. They were less susceptible to the stirring addresses of evangelical preachers, clerical or lay, than were the people of the provincial towns and even the dwellers in remote villages; and the remarkable preaching of

<sup>1</sup> Burn, "History of Fleet Marriages." Sydney, "England and the English in the Eighteenth Century," vol. ii. p. 380.

Romaine, who, week by week, taught justification by faith from the pulpit of St. Dunstan-in-the West, and later of St. Anne's, Blackfriars, was altogether exceptional, sometimes meeting with opposition, and sometimes causing large numbers to attend, many of whom, it may be suspected, listened to him only from curiosity.

A wedding, as has just been hinted, was not in those days the affair of a morning or an afternoon. Holidays in London were but few, and unquestionably a wedding was seized upon as an opportunity for merrymaking. In these festivals the London of the eighteenth century retained many of the customs of mediaeval England. They "lasted two or three days ; there was no honeymoon, no wedding journey ; the young couple remained in their own house ; the wedding tour, with the bridesmaid for companion, came later." That a wedding journey as we now understand it should be uncommon was a necessity of a time when travelling was difficult. "After the celebration in the church there was a great banquet given by the bride's father ; there was dancing and music after the feast ; outside the butchers performed with the marrow bones and cleavers ; the bridegroom, whose duty it was to wait upon the guests, gave the broken meat to the poor."<sup>1</sup> Everything again is typical of the age—material enjoyment after a purely formal religious ceremony.

In none of the events of human life has ceremony

<sup>1</sup> Besant, "London in the Eighteenth Century," p. 264.

played so large a part as in funerals, and in a period such as the eighteenth century, marked by the absence of simplicity and by an exaggerated decorum, which was in contrast with a frequent coarseness of speech and action, it was certain that funerals would be noticeable for their artificiality and ostentation. This aspect of a melancholy rite was more especially prominent in London, where men were wealthy and well-to-do, and where all the trappings of woe were at hand. To meet the requirements of the parishioners. many of the London churches kept handsome velvet palls ; the smallness of the parishes enabled mourners to walk to church and the procession moved over the short distance from the house to the grave headed by one or more beadles, with twelve or more pall-bearers ; the mourners followed two by two ; the church was hung with black, and plumes were borne before the coffin. It was a moment when the wealth and respectability of the merchant or the lawyer could be shown to the world. This panoply of woe, this complete hiding of natural human feeling under a mass of ceremonial among the middle and upper sections of society, continued for many years, indeed is still apparent, remaining a marked instance of eighteenth-century formalism, a formalism which was remarkable in London.

Nor was ostentation at funerals confined to the upper classes. The mechanic paid part of his earnings in his lifetime that he might be glorified at his death. For this purpose he belonged to a burial



club, the usual form of subscription being a shilling from every living member on the death of one of their fellows. Thus a substantial coffin, black cloaks, hoods and scarves could be supplied; large numbers of the trade followed the body of their comrade to the grave, usually during the night, and the ceremony ended with a feast of cake and wine.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WOMEN OF THE CAPITAL

THE mediaeval woman was essentially a housewife and a nurse ; the excessive families which she produced, even if not entirely reared, caused her time to be occupied with her children, and gave work to those who could care for their younger brothers and sisters. When she was not a nurse she was a housekeeper.

The life of a woman was little different in the town or the country, in or out of London, and in the eighteenth century in London in essentials she was the same as in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, though indications were not wanting of an increasing mental range and activity, and of an improving social condition. The wife of the tradesman, it was complained, " must have her fine clothes, her chaise or pad, with country lodgings, and go three times a week to public diversions." In other words, she was no longer content to sit at home and make her clothes. They could be bought, and she had money with which to purchase them, and she was not going to remain a mere drudge, when her husband went to his club and her son to Ranelagh. In her, too, the modern spirit of individuality was working. If Genoa velvets

and Mantua silks were exhibited in the shops of Ludgate Hill, why was she not to buy them and wear them and show them to the world? Money was plentiful, opportunity was at hand, and the woman of the eighteenth century was not going to remain longer only a housewife. A few women had begun to attract attention by reason of their mental activity, and those whose minds had vitality were stimulated by their example. "Mrs. Montague," enthusiastically exclaimed Fanny Burney, "is our sex's glory." Mrs. Thrale and her coterie worshipped brightness, they were always looking for it, and they exaggerated the least departure from dullness into wit. Spasmodically and partially, the minds of women in London were awakening, showing their mental activity in the production of books, in association with men of ability, in the search after bright verbal expression, in contempt for the country cousin. "His daughters," wrote Fanny Burney of the children of Robert Raikes of Gloucester, the philanthropist, with suggestive scorn, "are a common sort of country misses."

Though the woman of London was beginning to emerge from the servile position of past centuries, she was not in the matter of education a bit better than her country cousin. Of education, as we understand it, she had next to none. She was taught reading and writing and useful and ornamental needlework, when she was in her teens; when she grew a little older she learnt to dance, to play on the piano, the harpsichord, or the guitar, perhaps to speak French

and to play cards. Women who had been ladies' maids, or poor creatures who had no other means of livelihood, were the teachers ; system was entirely absent ; the subjects taught were few, and the instruction was superficial. Mental cultivation came chiefly from the pupil herself—from picking up her father's books, from intellectual interests casually excited and equally casually directed to some subject which attracted her.

But though the interests of the women of London were becoming less narrow, and their lives were enlarged, yet their days were generally monotonous. Monotony is not wearisome to those who have never felt the need for variety ; but at this time the increasing variety in the lives of men reacted on the women of the age, who found in cards the chief antidote to the dullness which they began to realize. When card-playing is general it naturally follows that among those who are heedless the pastime will develop into gambling. But gambling among women in London in the eighteenth century was certainly not extensive, and was confined to fashionable ladies in the West End. Card-playing was, however, more common among women than among men. While these were talking at their taverns, the women were passing the time at the card tables. It is an example of the way in which the life of a section of the community is regarded as representative, that the doings in St. James's Street have created the idea that gambling was general in London. Fox, at his faro bank ;

Selwyn forming what he called a "tie," that is arranging to pay to some friend twenty guineas for every ten which he should lose above fifty guineas in order to prevent himself from playing at high stakes; young Lord Stavordale losing eleven thousand pounds at one sitting; Lady Mary Coke carefully adding up her modest losses of seventy or a hundred guineas at "lu," were the leaders of a small though conspicuous coterie. The man of business, the lawyer, and the doctor did not play cards so much as their wives and daughters, who turned to them to break the monotony which was as yet unstirred by novels, by many places of amusement, and by facility of locomotion which, more than anything else, has changed the course of the lives of women. Cards, tea-gardens, shopping, seem but a poor antidote to the dullness of making jams and pickles, getting up linen, or pulling silver-thread in the parlour. But all the thousand-and-one occupations of a purely domestic life required some personal activity and represented part of the round of a wholesome home-life, and this, after all, was the essential feature in winter and summer, in youth and age, of the woman of London as of her country sister. It produced no little activity and some independence, and unquestionably an ordered freedom. It probably accounts for the marked difference between the efforts of the French and the English woman at this time, for the intellectual woman of London was not in the least subjective. She was quiet and tranquil, and seldom

desired to reign over a brilliant *salon*. The girl of London, if she learnt less than the child who in Paris passed her days in a convent, was brought up, if in ignorance, yet in freedom, and in contact with boys and youths, so that, although her interests were largely engrossed by clothes and cards, she developed into a free and healthy creature.

The coarseness and brutality which marked the lower classes of Englishmen in the eighteenth century were equally noticeable among the poorer women of London. It is a sign of increasing civilization when physical work is more and more allotted to men, in those times many things were done by women which are now the task only of men. Women sometimes enlisted in the army or volunteered into the navy, and instances of women disguised as men, and engaged in civil occupation are frequent. Much of the work about the Thames side was done by women, and they cultivated most of the market gardens by which the metropolis was surrounded, carried the produce to market on their heads, and hawked it through the streets. Everywhere the courtesan was seen—banned in theory by the law, she was still found all over London, only the poorest, who could not bribe the constable, being hurried to the bridewell.

Self-respect and education were not yet universal among the middle and upper classes, and so large numbers of the poorer women were both coarse and degraded. But unquestionably their condition was, in spite of these failings, improving in a marked degree.

We see this by the fact that the London housewife of the eighteenth century was already beginning to complain bitterly of her servants. They were said to be exorbitant in their demand for higher wages, which, from thirty to forty shillings a year at the beginning of the century, had, towards the middle and later period of the age, increased to six, seven, and eight pounds. The mistress, too, complained that her servants were too well educated, too independent, too fond of fine clothes; "scarcely a wench," complains a lady in Johnson's paper in the *Idler* (1750), where Betty Brown tells the story of her life, "was to be got for all work, since education had made such numbers of fine ladies that nobody would now accept a lower title than that of waiting-maid, or something that might qualify her to wear laced shoes and long ruffles and to sit at work in the parlour window." And, says another contemporary writer, "plain country Jane is changed into a fine London madam." These and many similar facts are striking evidence of the change for the better in all classes of society, marking, in regard to servants, an advance from a condition little different from slavery, or something like it, to that of free individuals giving their services in exchange for a fair return of money. It meant that servants were beginning to obtain higher remuneration, that locomotion, in spite of bad roads and many difficulties, was easier, so that the rural districts could supply the capital with workpeople—the beginning of a movement which to-day is one of the

most common features of English social life. It meant also that the interests of daily existence were becoming larger, and that the differences between the several classes of which society is formed were becoming less marked, we are, in fact, on the threshold of modern English life.

It is fatal to a proper appreciation of any epoch in the past to consider it from a modern point of view. Neither the agreeable nor disagreeable aspects of the eighteenth century gave as much pleasure or as much pain to the men of the age, we may be sure, as they appear to us to do. Put a modern Londoner on the top of a coach for a drive to Oxford; if the weather and company be pleasant he will probably say he had never spent a more enjoyable day in his life; if circumstances are adverse, his comments on his day's expedition will be equally adverse. But the Londoner who in 1750 set out from Holborn to drive to Cambridge took the good and the bad of the time with an equal mind. Will Marvel's imaginary adventures in his journey to Devonshire were, after all, only amusing exaggerations of the common vicissitudes of the traveller in rain and sunshine, and many social and natural features, which seem to us intolerable, would be passed over with scarcely a complaint. To us, with modern London extending for many miles from its centre—a series of monotonous streets—the parks and the numerous public gardens of the eighteenth century, the rural aspect of the districts immediately around London, the clear and stately



river with its ships and boats, appeal, if we realize the town in the aggregate, with singular force, to our forefathers they were part of their ordinary existence. Unquestionably they made London very agreeable, and they tended to tranquillity, to variety of outward aspect—a fortunate circumstance in days when change of scene was difficult of attainment even by the prosperous. But after all, allowing for obvious defects, London in the eighteenth century must have been an uncommonly enjoyable place to its inhabitant. He lived in a tranquil age, he was an observer, rather than a figure, in the process of national development. Only in literature and in art were there in London signs of the evolution of national energy. In the towns and districts of the Midlands and of the North, striking industrial movements were in progress which were changing the face of England, bringing into play new political and social forces, and altering the elements of society. We may admit that the Londoner had no high ideals, that he was sunk in a good-natured conservatism, that the political state was torpid, that society was gross, and that the lives of most women were extremely monotonous. But with all these defects London was the capital of Great Britain, and its inhabitants realized the fact. It had all the characteristics of a capital, a governing class which was in evidence out of all proportion to its numbers, and a middle class which looked down on those who lived outside the metropolis; it was the seat of government, the centre of literary and political

activity, the resort of foreigners. Ignorant as its people often were, the town was quite unprovincial. Its very position, somewhat apart from the rest of the Kingdom, and within measurable distance of the Continent, and especially of France, tended to sustain an interest in European as well as in home affairs. London and Paris in the eighteenth century were in fact the only cities which had the attributes of capitals, and it was partly from this fact that a social intimacy between the leaders of society in France and in England was possible and actual.

## CHAPTER V

### THE CITY OF PLEASURE

THE more closely we survey English society in the eighteenth century, looking back on its men and women, on their daily life, their habits and their habitations, the more we are struck by the intimate connection of Bath with the century. It strikes the mind with a sense of surprise, it is full of contrasts. As a town, as a haunt of men, it differed altogether from any other place in England, for it was essentially a City of Pleasure. As such it emerges with, and likewise vanishes with, the century, as such too, its society has gone to keep company with that of Pompeii and Herculaneum, for Bath of the eighteenth century is as much a piece of antiquity as is the City of *Aquæ Solis*. The social milieu and the personal atmosphere which was peculiar to it have departed. One may still find places—old-country and cathedral towns—where, though centuries have passed away, and new generations of men have come and gone, the localities have not altogether lost their ancient atmosphere. But the material and quite substantial remnants of the eighteenth century in Bath no more retain the human characteristics of the particular age in which they

were built than do the Roman baths the life of the Roman town; both are now mere architectural antiquities. Yet there are still gathered round the warm and perpetual springs of a town in a secluded and picturesque part of England men and women seeking from these healing waters relief from bodily ills as they did nineteen centuries ago, when these same springs were the centre of the Roman baths—among the remains of which strangers now ramble—and of the agreeable but now departed villas of the city of Aquæ Solis. Throughout the Middle Ages the same attraction drew the stranger to this important city in the valley of the Avon. But gradually the modern characteristics of the place emerge from the hazy past as descriptive writing grows and preserves local features for future readers. The invaluable Leland pictures Bath, as he did so many of the places of Elizabethan England, with its “temperate and pleasant springs much frequented of people diseased with various horrid ills” and “great aches.” From that point of time we see it more clearly, gradually becoming, difficult as travelling was along the founde-rous roads of rural England, a Mecca of the sick, the rendez-vous especially of noblemen and of the affluent, and at last of royalty itself in the person of Anne of Denmark, the consort of James I.

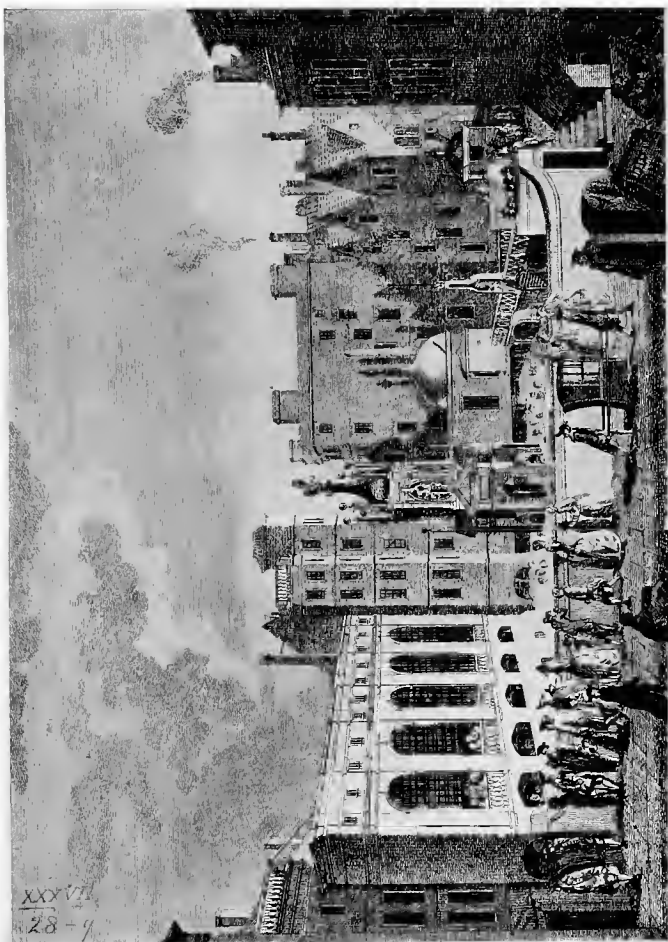
To reach Bath in those days was a tiresome and even dangerous expedition; its cost prevented any but people of means from undertaking it, and the rich in the seventeenth century were chiefly great landed

proprietors. In 1663 came the visit of Charles II. and his Queen, which drew more attention to the value of the waters, and then that of Queen Anne in 1702, which was the beginning of the remarkable period which continued throughout the eighteenth century, when Bath held a unique position in the social history of England. We may follow the fortunes of the city from that interesting epoch to our own time, when it has fallen to a tranquil and rather dull watering-place, the abiding interest of which lies in the unexampled depiction, by its streets, its crescents, its circus, and its many remarkable houses, of the external aspect of the pleasure city of England in the eighteenth century. Here were gathered, as nowhere else, a representative collection of society—the nobleman, the squire, the rich merchant, the affluent professional man, the politician, the author, the player, and the gambler, with the various women folk, more or less virtuous, necessarily attendant on so kaleidoscopic an assemblage. Such, in a word, was the gay and fashionable Bath of the eighteenth century, which remains permanently depicted in the pages of novelists, dramatists, and letter-writers.

Many of those who came thither to take the baths or to drink the waters were more or less ailing; but the greater number who were supposed to require the aid of the healing springs, were imaginary invalids, who made the waters an excuse for change of amusement, and for social intercourse. Around this collec-

tion of persons who came with a real or fictitious purpose was gathered a large and miscellaneous crowd, openly and frankly attracted to Bath simply and solely for pleasure. Here, for example, "a man has daily opportunities of seeing the most remarkable characters of the community. He sees them in their natural attitudes and true colours, descended from their pedestals, and divested of their formal draperies, undisguised by art and affectation. Here we have ministers of state, judges, generals, bishops, projectors, philosophers, wits, poets, players, chemists, fiddlers, and buffoons . . . Another entertainment peculiar to Bath arises from the general mixture of all degrees, assembled in our public rooms without distinction of rank or fortune."<sup>1</sup> Bath was the only place in England which responded to a complex demand—the demand for social intercourse unfettered by formality or by differences of rank, for change of air, and for new scenes sufficiently rural to satisfy, without discomfort, the desire for country life, the full appreciation of which was as yet unattained by the habitués of St. James's Street, who was not able to find enjoyment in sport or in country pleasures, and who had an unmitigated contempt for the manners of the ordinary country gentleman. To the man of letters, and to the wit of the coffee-house, the fox-hunting squire was the personification of ignorance and of bad manners, and he in his turn looked on the one as wanting in all manly qualities and on the other as

<sup>1</sup> Smollett, "Humphrey Clinker" (ed. 1811), p. 50.



BATH.





contemptibly conceited. Yet at Bath each of these antagonistic characters met on common ground, the squire and his wife and daughter finding there the only place where the pleasures of the capital could be enjoyed within measurable distance of the manor-house, and where town fashions could be studied and town amusements followed without the irksomeness of a stay in a great city. Quite early in the century (1714) Pope, evidently in a good humour, sitting—we may imagine—in the autumn sunlight, watching the throng moving to and fro about the entrance to the Pump Room, wrote to his friends, the Blounts: “From the window where I am seated I command the prospect of twenty or thirty yards in one of the finest promenades in the world, every moment that I take my eye off from the paper. If variety of diversions and new objects be capable of driving our friends out of our minds, I have the best excuse imaginable for forgetting you; for I have slid, I can’t tell how, into all the amusements of the place. My whole day is shared by the Pump assemblies, the walks, the chocolate-houses, raffling-shops, medleys, etc. . . . I endeavour (like all awkward fellows) to become agreeable by imitation; and, observing who are most in favour with the fair, I sometimes copy the civil air of Gascoin, sometimes the impudent one of Nash, and sometimes, for vanity, the silly one of a neighbour of yours, who has lost to the gamesters here that money of which the ladies only deserve to rob a man of his age.”<sup>1</sup> Later in

<sup>1</sup> “Pope’s Works” (Elwin & Courthope), vol. ix. p. 251.

the period, Mrs. Delany, a good judge of the world, wrote to Swift (1736), "I think Bath a more comfortable place to live in than London; all the entertainments of the place lie in a small compass, and you are at your liberty to let them alone just as it suits your humour."<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Delany was herself an excellent example of many cultivated and sensible women who found year after year in Bath a scene of congenial recreation—pleasure without toil, companionship without effort, and freedom from social duties and the often equally troublesome bonds of a forced so-called pleasure. As Mrs. Thrale, a constant and a lifelong lover of Bath, said, at the end of the century, it was the place which best could lengthen and most could gladden life.

Cynical opinions of Bath might be formed by less kindly natures than these agreeable women, especially if one liked to dwell on the seamy side of human nature. Of this Smollett is the great depicter. Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle are the central figures in a society of rakes and gamblers. After many adventures by land and sea, the one goes to Bath to pick up an heiress—Miss Snapper the daughter of a Turkey merchant, who had been bequeathed a fortune—the other to distinguish himself in the fashionable world. Arrived at Bath, each finds himself surrounded by a selfish and disreputable crowd. These novels, which take their titles from Smollett's two heroes, were written in 1748 and 1751, and may be accepted as true

<sup>1</sup> "Autobiography," vol. i. p. 553.

pictures of parts of the society of Bath at the middle of the century. But too much regard should not be paid to the particular section of society which figures so vividly in Smollett's pages. At that time it suited his talent and his fancy to depict that part of society which he knew well, but later in his life he shows us a more quiet and more honourable company and, though manners may have generally softened between 1751 and 1771, the difference in the atmosphere of Smollett's earlier and later works is caused by his intention to present different sides of life at Bath.

"Bath," says Goldsmith, "came into vogue because people of fashion had no agreeable summer retreat from the town (London) and usually spent that season amidst a solitude of country squires, parsons' wives, and visiting tenants or farmers; they wanted some place where they might have each other's company and win each other's money as they had done during the winter in town." To the country folk Bath was a unique city, more lively, more amusing, and more diverting than any of the provincial capitals, such as Shrewsbury in the north-west and Norwich in the east; Londoners found it gayer and more comfortable than Tunbridge Wells with its rural attractions. Thus two streams met year by year at Bath, and only at Bath—the stream from the metropolis and the stream from the rural districts of the West, the South and the Midlands of England—increased by recruits from among the business and commercial classes of Bristol,

each stream being impelled to this centre by influences and tendencies and temporal facts peculiar to the particular age, which did not exist before, and which vanished under the effect of an increasing population and the growth of progress during the succeeding century—the improvement of locomotion,<sup>1</sup> the increase of light literature, the spread of general knowledge, and the more frequent intermixture of the different classes throughout the country.

The social cosmopolitanism of Bath was more than superficial; it indicated the fortunate facility with which the English people have fused the several classes for all practical and public purposes. The landed aristocracy were yet for many years to come to be the chief administrators of English government, but the growth of industrial energy and of the influence of capital—that growth of the “moneyed men,” which had been so disagreeable a spectacle to the Tories in the reign of Queen Anne—was to be seen in social circles in Bath. The active persons who had returned with a fortune from the Colonies or India were by no means welcome to many of the other frequenters of Bath. “Every upstart of fortune,” writes gouty Squire Bramble, “harnessed in the trappings of the mode, presents himself at Bath, as in the very focus of ob-

<sup>1</sup> The gradual change in the speed of travelling, even by coach, is illustrated by the fact that in 1750 the time on the journey from London to Bath was three days. In 1776 Johnson started at 11 a.m., and arrived the next day at 7 p.m. In 1827 Dickens makes his hero leave at 7 a.m. and arrive at 7.30 p.m.

servation. Clerks and factors from the East Indies, loaded with the spoil of plundered provinces ; planters, negro-drivers, and hucksters, from our American plantations, enriched they know not how ; agents, commissaries, and contractors, who had fattened, in two successive wars, on the blood of the nation ; usurers, brokers, and jobbers of every kind ; men of low birth and no breeding, have found themselves suddenly translated into a state of affluence, unknown to former ages ; and no wonder that their brains should be intoxicated with pride, vanity, and presumption. Knowing no other criterion of greatness but the ostentation of wealth, they discharge their affluence without taste or conduct through every channel of the most absurd extravagance ; and all of them hurry to Bath, because here, without any further qualification, they can mingle with the princes and nobles of the land. Even the wives and daughters of low tradesmen, who, like shovel-nosed sharks, prey upon the blubber of those uncouth whales of fortune, are infected with the same rage of displaying their importance ; and the slightest indisposition serves them for a pretext to insist upon being conveyed to Bath, where they may hobble country-dances and cotillions among lordlings, squires, counsellors, and clergy. These delicate creatures from Bedfordbury, Butcher Row, Crutched Friars, and Botolph Lane, cannot breathe in the gross air of the lower town, or conform to the vulgar rules of a common lodging house ; the husband, therefore, must provide an entire house, or elegant

apartments in the new buildings. Such is the composition of what is called the fashionable company at Bath, where a very inconsiderable proportion of genteel people are lost in a mob of impudent plebeians, who have neither understanding nor judgment, nor the least idea of propriety and decorum, and seem to enjoy nothing so much as an opportunity of insulting their betters.”<sup>1</sup>

The plebeian was, in other words, the man of commerce, and the “genteel people” were the great landed proprietors and the country squires, the latter being especially nervous of the growing power of the men of business, whom the former regarded with some disdain, but without fear, for the position of the nobility was too secure to be affected by the influx of merchants and manufacturers, however wealthy.

In London the nabob, as it was the fashion to call the merchant who had made his fortune in the East, was beginning to obtain a footing in Parliament and among politicians, since his wealth enabled him to buy one or more pocket boroughs. But a seat at Westminster did not necessarily give an entrée either to a fashionable club in St. James’s Street, or to an aristocratic mansion in Bloomsbury. At Bath, however, the nabob and his family could meet in the Pump Room the best bred people in England, though their pleasure in so doing was in some degree spoilt by the necessity of rubbing shoulders with the wives and daughters of

<sup>1</sup> “Humphrey Clinker” (ed. 1811), p. 37.

the "low tradesmen," who, as well as the merely wealthy frequenters of Bath, were impartially disliked by the Squire Brambles of the age—that is, by the county gentry.

The basis of the pleasures of Bath was, in fact, social intercourse, the meeting of men and women of all grades of society without formality, and with the object of enjoying themselves. From a modern point of view, Bath, even in the height of its fame, might appear to some to have been a dull place. Concerts, theatrical performances, card parties, assemblies, picnics, and drives, in themselves alone do not form a particularly intellectual series of amusements. But they brought people together, many of whom led tedious lives at home, and so there prevailed a feeling of gaiety and of bonhomie, which was the permanent and prevailing note of the place.

It would be an exaggeration to say, because Bath had this unique power of drawing to it, and there, as it were, mingling together various sections of society above the lower ranks of the English people, that it had a distinct effect on the national character. One cannot, however, doubt that this intermixture of diverse classes year after year throughout a century must have had some influence on the general development of English society. During their visits to Bath politicians became better acquainted with the growing importance of men of business; the country squire was introduced to the shipowner from London and Bristol and to the wit from town. But

the influence of Bath, whilst unquestionably powerful, was also largely indefinable. It is impossible, in surveying the growth of this intercourse, to indicate distinct evidences of a change of feeling, however much we may be sure that it existed. The milieu of Bath was essentially one of pleasure, and its temporary inhabitants, as has been said, were largely pleasure-seekers, so that it is easy amidst its scandals, its egotism, its petty social ambitions and strifes, to lose sight of the larger influences of the place, and of the indication which is visible of impending changes in English society, of the craving at this time of various sections of the people to emerge into a freer day, to have a less restricted life than heretofore, to move from home, to meet their fellow-men—in fact to be modern.

It has followed from its peculiar position in the eighteenth century that Bath occupies a striking place in the fiction and drama of the age alike in the pages of Fielding, of Smollett, and of Miss Austen, and in the plays of Foote and Sheridan. For nowhere were characters of the most varied kind more easily studied, nowhere were the opportunities of finding subjects for the new school of personal characterization, for the analysis of temperaments and motives, more near at hand than in the City of Pleasure.

The indraught to one centre of men and women with the most opposite pursuits and of the most divergent interests, with leisure as well as money, made it an admirable field for the portrait painter.



"My son," Mrs. Barber wrote to Swift, in 1736, "who is learning to paint, goes on well, and if he be in the least approved of, in all probability he may do well at Bath, for I never saw a painter that came hither fail of getting more business than he could do, be him ever so indifferent."<sup>1</sup> Later in the century William Hoare, one of the first members of the Royal Academy, a capable and industrious artist, had many patrons, Pitt, Lord Camden, and Pope being among those who sat to him. Barker, "of Bath," spent his whole life, during the latter half of the century, at work in this city on landscapes and portraits. But the two great painters who are permanently associated with Bath are Gainsborough and Lawrence, more especially Gainsborough, and the years (1760-1774) which he spent at Bath are conterminous with the most interesting time in its history. He settled in the Circus (No. 24) in such fine apartments that his prudent wife was frightened at the probable expense of living in that dignified and agreeable locality, where Chatham built himself a house (No. 7), and where to-day in its stately quiet one almost expects to meet the infirm peer carried in a chair from the baths.

Among the portraits which Gainsborough painted during this period are those of nearly all the notable persons who came to the city. The Duke of Cumberland, Lord Chesterfield, Lady Ligonier, Wade—who succeeded Nash as master of the ceremonies—the

<sup>1</sup> Cited, Barbeau's "Bath" (English edition), p. 287 (note).

Lindleys, and Garrick, are among those who sat to him. This enumeration indicates the mixed and cosmopolitan life of the town. The pleasant scenery around the city also gave Gainsborough constant subjects for landscapes; "The Cottage Door" and "The Watering Place" belong to this period, and to-day an elm near the road from Bath to London is known as Gainsborough's Elm. But apart from his work as an artist, Gainsborough is not largely identified with the social life of Bath. His was a reticent nature. No one was more alive to the daily exhibition of human character which Bath offered, but he probably saw too much of the frequenters of the place as sitters and as the friends of sitters to care to mingle in their general life, and preferred to amuse himself at home on his violin or hautboy, or to chat with Quin, rather than to play cards or attend a dance at the Assembly Rooms.

A modern critic has noticed the considerable advance as a painter which Gainsborough made after he came to Bath on the advice of his good-natured and rather officious friend Thicknesse, and has ascribed it to the opportunities he now had—which were unobtainable at Ipswich—of seeing fine masterpieces at Wilton Castle and other country-houses. But it may be doubted if such occasional visits would have this effect, and the greater power and scope of Gainsborough after he settled at Bath are due, probably, to the confidence arising from immediate success, and from the mental stimulus received from daily intercourse

with many men of the highest parts. "Why, sir," he wrote to Henderson, the actor, in 1773, "what makes the difference between man and man is real performance, and not genius or conception."

If Bath were not the scene of strenuous lives, at any rate those who had taken part in great affairs, and those who in the future were to make their mark, rested there for a while, and Gainsborough was daily in their stimulating company. His sojourn at Bath marks the beginning of "real performance," the seizing of the highest position in his art, whilst in his life it comprises a period of happy days, of easy yet continuous work in a society often of distinguished, generally of interesting and representative men.

Lawrence is a less noteworthy and important figure on the gay scene than Gainsborough, for during his life at Bath he was not much more than an infant prodigy. He began work in pastels at Bath in 1782, at the early age of eleven, and remained there for six years, when he became a student at the Royal Academy Schools in London. One would suppose that it was impossible for a child to have more than an artistic facility, and that the work which he did at Bath would probably be due to the personal attraction and chatter of a delightful lad; but the inherent gifts of Lawrence were abnormal, and his studio was crowded. Among those whose portraits he drew during these few years were Mrs. Siddons, the Bishop of Durham, Lord Barrington, and others whose favour showed how much leisure they

had to occupy, rather than the actual greatness of Lawrence as an artist in those early days. But if famous frequenters of Bath idled away their time in the studios of Gainsborough and Lawrence, there were others who fancied that it would amuse them to become amateur artists. Hard work was the last thing that a pleasure-seeker at Bath desired, and opportunely enough an ingenious and clever artist made his appearance in the middle of the century, who "professed to teach amateurs how to produce pretty pictures without imposing on them the necessity of study."<sup>1</sup> Alexander Cozens was an illegitimate son of Peter the Great, and came from Italy to England in 1746; a few years later he appeared at Bath, and has left us some excellent examples of early water-colour art. But surely nothing he ever did was cleverer, or more characteristic of the place, than his scheme to enable the dilettanti of the City of Pleasure to learn to paint without study.

Bath was London without its labour; politics could be discussed without spending hours listening to debates at Westminster, and the affairs of the East India Company without sitting in an office in the dimness of the City. The place was permeated with a light atmosphere of an arduous pleasure more French than English; it was the only town in England where the first object of every one was to be amused. The moment that, in any society, large or small, it is admitted that to be a bore is the chief of offences,

<sup>1</sup> Cundall, "History of British Water Colour Painting," p. 32.

that society becomes a social democracy. And so at Bath a wit was more appreciated than a peer.

This special feature of the place was, for the first fifty years of the century, accentuated by the remarkable and unique influence of "Beau" Nash, who was to be the arbiter of society at Bath after the year 1702. He gained his sobriquet from his absurd display in dress; but, in his social realm, princesses, peers, and boors, were lectured and snubbed by him with equal impartiality and rudeness. One day, having forbidden ladies to appear at assemblies in white aprons, the Duchess of Queensberry came wearing the obnoxious garment. Nash tore it off and threw it aside, saying that "such articles were suitable only for Abigails," and the Duchess promptly begged his pardon. He was not less severe with the incongruities of dress of the country squires who lived in their high boots and spurs. These gentlemen he ridiculed in a lampoon—Fontinella's "Invitation to the Assembly"—which ends with these lines :—

" For why shouldn't we  
In dress be as free  
As Hog's Norton Squire in boots ? " <sup>1</sup>

In a lively farce played by Nash's direction, *Punch* remarks, when he is going to bed in his boots, "Why, madam, you may as well bid me pull off my legs."

The code of rules which Nash had framed and hung

<sup>1</sup> Goldsmith, "Life of Nash," p. 60.

in the Pump Room, in 1742, touched on polite manners rather than on becoming dress, but it was composed in the same strain of raillery,—as we should now think of impertinence—as thus: “That gentlemen crowding before the ladies at the ball show ill-manners, and that none do so for the future, except such as respect nobody but themselves.” We are inclined to laugh at Nash’s social despotism and at his impudence; but a man who was nothing more than a mere brainless and jesting adventurer could not have exercised his social sway year after year—a sway which declined chiefly through old age; he must have possessed some special qualities. Born in 1674, after being sent down from the University of Oxford Nash became a student at the Temple, where he was notorious among his contemporaries for his frivolous and dissipated life. He went to Bath with the crowd of gamblers and idlers who found there opportunities for gaming and pleasure, with the purpose of getting his livelihood by gambling. Just at this time Dr. John Radcliffe began to depreciate the medicinal value of the waters of Bath, and Nash determined to assist the city in a practical way. He saw that more might be done to make the place agreeable as well as healthy, and one of his first attempts with this object was to establish an orchestra. The story of his sudden rise is not clear, but probably he had already made himself personally popular. As amusement was the aim of most who came to the city, and as Nash was so opportunely bent on enlarging the means of agreeably passing the time, was so much



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awake to the need of improvement, whether by new assembly rooms or better roads, he was, on the death of Captain Webster, appointed master of the ceremonies. This was probably about 1704, and the post gave an opening for his particular talents. Nash has been well described as "an agreeable and ingenious person of organizing capacity." He possessed tact, which enabled him to know how to treat individuals; a knowledge of men, and decision of character. In truth, he was endowed with a special capacity for a peculiar position, one which to many would have been trivial, not to say ridiculous. He filled it with sufficient seriousness to make it appear, as indeed in some senses it was, positively important.

It was well understood in Bath that Nash really desired to make the place pleasant to, and its amusements obtainable by, every one, and so his subjects—being bent on pleasure—tacitly agreed to abide by his decisions and decrees. Dropping the character of a spendthrift, he became a social power. His position gave him influence and friends. "Beau" Nash was a success,<sup>1</sup> and has even had the good fortune to have Goldsmith as a biographer and to live in the pages of this writer. One may smile, as Goldsmith says, "at the solemnity he assumed in adjusting trifles," though,

<sup>1</sup> Nash lived for the greater part of his time at Bath, in a house in St. John's Court designed by Thomas Greenway, which is now part of the theatre. He died in another house, where he had lived for about twelve years, a little to the north of his first home. Green's "Eighteenth Century Architecture of Bath," p. 25, and plates xvii. and xviii.

after all, experience shows that it is often by the proper adjustment of trifles—especially in such a place as Bath—that peace between persons is preserved. But he had higher capacities than that of merely knowing how to preserve the social peace, he was not without wit, of the use of which he was sparing; his good nature and his kindliness were universally recognized, and his adaptability to all sorts and conditions of men is clear. It cannot, indeed, be doubted that he obtained an income from gambling; it is probable, however, that his gains were made chiefly through confederates, and that to the outside world he was a mere amateur player like any one of it. “Here,” wrote Lady Bristol to her husband, September 20, 1721, “is very deep play . . . Nash lost £50 a Saturday at Harrison’s”; that is to say, at the Assembly Rooms. Lord Chesterfield wittily remarked, “I don’t wonder at your losing money, Nash, but all the world is surprised where you get it to lose.”

About 1745, or perhaps earlier—there seems to be an uncertainty as to the exact date—Nash imprudently brought an action against Walter Wiltshire, a confederate, to recover a share of the gains at Lindsay’s Assembly Room. In 1740 an Act had been passed against public gambling, and in 1745 a still more stringent statute became law, under which Wiltshire himself was sued by the Vestry of St. Peter and St. Paul for keeping a gambling house and was fined £500. A new generation had arisen, less inclined to submit to Nash’s rule, and these proceedings were sufficient

to bring the Master of the Ceremonies into a disrepute now not unwelcome to many visitors.

The special position which Bath holds in English history is thus, partly, conterminous with the life of Nash. During this period Bath changed from an inconvenient watering-place, with small, badly constructed, and often unhealthy houses, to the dignified city which now remains. Landor, who lived at Bath for many years, with the enthusiasm of a lover likened it to Florence. But the likeness only arises from configuration of ground, and in Bath we see typified in stone mainly the English eighteenth century with its sturdy common sense and serenity, while in the verdant and immediate surroundings are visible the attraction of the peaceful countryside, which helped not a little to draw to the city men and women from the larger world, and from the dust and din of London.<sup>1</sup>

Bath was fortunate that, at the moment when her re-creation became urgent, a man singularly suited to carry out the work was at hand. Joseph Wood was a shrewd young Yorkshireman, born in 1704, and was probably introduced to Bath by Ralph Allen, the mastermind of the place. As an architect he had clear and definite ideas, and he aspired to create a fine and distinguished modern city in place of the cramped town which clustered round the Roman Baths and the mediaeval Abbey. By the end of the year 1725 he had formed a grandiose plan—at the instance, it may

<sup>1</sup> Green, "The Eighteenth Century Architecture of Bath," p. 35.

be, of Allen, whose ideas were large and daring, as his career had shown—for the erection of various public buildings and dwelling-houses. There was to be “a grand place of assembly,” to be called the “Royal Forum of Bath”; another place, no less magnificent, for the exhibition of sports, to be named the “Grand Circus”—the original idea of the admirable buildings known to many generations as the Circus. It was not, however, till the end of 1727 that his ideas took definite shape, and that he agreed with Mr. Gay, a considerable landowner in Bath, to construct a new street. This was the beginning of a work which soon transformed the city. Wood was his own contractor—he was, in a sense, a speculative builder, who, unlike most of his kind, built not only for his contemporaries, but for posterity. He had imagination, courage, and technical capacity, and the invaluable support of a patron not less courageous, not less large in his ideas, actuated by civic virtue, and resolute in practical endeavour. The combination was unusual, and the result was unexampled in the history of British architecture. Moreover, Wood had the good fortune to be followed by a son who carried out his father’s designs, and was permeated by his father’s architectural views.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century the houses of Bath were old, dilapidated, and dirty; by the end of it the town had, by the work of one man—whose successor wisely followed the lines he had laid down—been transformed into a dignified, spacious,

and healthy city, so admirable in its form, and in its colouring, that it has retained its individuality through succeeding years. Queen's Square, the Circus—finished by the son in 1765, eleven years after Wood's death—the spacious parades, the Lower Rooms, were Wood's own work.<sup>1</sup> The more it is considered the more remarkable is seen to be the result achieved—the creation of a city substantial enough to long outlive its builders, consistent and harmonious in its parts, and so attaining an unusual architectural individuality. The Royal Crescent was both designed and completed (1771) by the younger Wood; his successor, Baldwin (1750–1820), was the designer of Pulteney Street and Laura Place. But chiefly from the mind of the elder Wood sprang the designs for the buildings of eighteenth-century Bath, the merit of which consists not only in the dignity of its individual streets and buildings, but also in the remarkable harmony which characterises the entire architecture of the modern town which arose during the reign of Nash.

“The peculiar merit of the Woods in proposing and accomplishing this task was that they were architects and not mere builders; that they had the beauty of the city they were transforming always before their eyes; that they conceived and carried out a harmonious whole. Their ideal is no longer ours altogether; the academic style is far from having retained the universal favour. . . . Rigorous criticism

<sup>1</sup> Green, “The Eighteenth Century Architecture of Bath,” p. 119.

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will find their regularity a little cold sometimes, their solemnity a little heavy, their decoration somewhat poor, their invention somewhat circumscribed. But, granting all this, their conception remains original, dignified, and happy.”<sup>1</sup>

It may be added that the architect never lost sight of utility in a search for the picturesque, and that houses which were built in Bath in the eighteenth century were solid as well as handsome, comfortable to live in as well as agreeable to look at.

A fortunate concurrence of circumstances—the advent of an architect of singularly bold views, the need for the enlargement of the town, and the existence of public-spirited and enlightened citizens—resulted in the creation of the new Bath. The old town was transformed into the unique city which has remained to us, and the change, contemporaneous as it was with the marked improvements in English roads which began after 1745, caused an influx of visitors far more numerous than would have come thither if drawn to Bath for purposes of health alone.

It is not difficult even now to picture the place as it was in the days of Pitt, of Sheridan, and of Gainsborough, though the extending and somewhat mean suburbs have broken the well-defined lines of the ample town which lay on the right bank of the Avon enclosed in an opportune bend of the river, having as its centre the ruins of the Roman Bath and of the Gothic Abbey. And it is easy to realise

<sup>1</sup> Barbeau, “Life and Letters at Bath,” p. 285.

how fair it must have seemed alike to the Londoner and the countryman. The dweller in the metropolis, fatigued by several days of disagreeable travel over muddy roads, alarmed by fears of highwaymen at each end of his journey—on Hounslow Heath or in secluded country lanes—vexed, made ill maybe, by forced stays at mean wayside inns, blown about by the winds of the Wiltshire Downs, arrived in a spacious and attractive city, where, if a well-known personage, he was welcomed by a peal from the bells of the Abbey. On one side lay the green slopes of Lansdown Hill; on the other, above and below the town, the meadows of the valley of the Avon, hemmed in by the steep and wooded sides of Widecombe and of Beechen Cliff. Along the lower side of Walcot Street were a few dwelling-houses, behind them gardens and orchards fringed the river, while from the Royal Crescent to the point where Milk Street touched the Avon was an open and fruitful country. Below the end of the favourite promenade the North Parade, the Avon flowed peacefully, its willow-lined course unbroken by any bridge.<sup>1</sup> Leaning on the balustrade which extended along the side of this pleasant walk, and looking up the valley, the most blasé townsman could not but feel, even in those very material days, the charm of this varied and attractive landscape.

The predominant features of the place were the classical style, the size, dignity, and orderliness of

<sup>1</sup> The North Parade Bridge was not built till 1836. Pulteney Bridge was built in 1769.

the buildings, and the varied yet quiet beauty of the country by which Bath was surrounded, and which was on all sides visible. The new arrival, were he from London, could not see anything similar from one end of England to the other ; with much discomfort he could visit cathedrals standing amid mediaeval buildings, as at Chester or Winchester, but nowhere were material well-being and pleasure combined as at Bath, while the mere sight of the countryside, of the young sportsmen driving their teams on the London road, gave the feeling of country life without the discomforts of country living. The squire would note with no little surprise the fine streets and the substantial houses ; he would feel that he was at length in the world ; and while the rural scenes close at hand impressed the Londoner with the sense of change, they brought to the countryman the feeling of home. We may look around England in vain for any place which was comparable with Bath.

It was certain that the frivolity and worldliness which characterised much of the society of Bath would make it a field for the propagation of the new Christianity of which John Wesley and Whitefield were the chief apostles. To invade Bath was, as Charles Wesley said with spiritual relish, "attacking Satan at his headquarters." The stagnation and the formalism of the Established Church produced the religious revival which resulted in the formation of the Methodist Church—a movement, as has been often pointed out, which was not in its inception



antagonistic to the Church of England. But its emotional character made it distasteful to a society such as that of Bath, careful of conventional forms, and living, for the time at least, a life of pleasure. The feeling of the majority of those who stayed at Bath was expressed when the Duchess of Buckingham—in terms not too strongly marked with the sentiments of Christianity—wrote to Lady Huntingdon :

“I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers. Their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting, and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.”<sup>1</sup>

The revolt against formalism in literature, and the increasing love of nature and of reality, were at work in Bath, but this fact did not make the labours of Wesley and Whitefield less objectionable to men and women who were still encompassed by limitations, although, unknown to themselves, they were endeavouring to escape from them.

When Wesley appeared at Bath, in 1739, he was naturally regarded as a nuisance by the larger part of the inhabitants who had come there, not to be

<sup>1</sup> “Life and Times of Lady Huntingdon,” vol. i., p. 27.

converted from their sins, but to be cured of their bodily ailments, or for change of social and local scene. To none was Wesley more objectionable than to the amiable, sometimes learned, and rather idle ecclesiastical dignitaries who mixed among the secular throng in the Pump Room.

Wesley himself tells how he came into conflict with Nash. It was a scene characteristic of the time. Wesley, indeed, on the Parade at Bath is as important a figure in the social picture of this age as is Savonarola preaching in the Duomo at Florence in that of the Italian Renaissance; and its suggestiveness, the way in which it throws into strong relief the opposing tendencies of the age, should not be overlooked. The third time that Wesley preached Nash appeared on the scene and demanded of him by what authority he did these things :

“I replied, ‘By the authority of Jesus Christ, conveyed to me by the (now) Archbishop of Canterbury, when he laid his hands upon me and said, “Take thou authority to preach the Gospel.”’ He said, ‘This is contrary to Act of Parliament. This is a Conventicle.’ I answered, ‘Sir, the Conventicles mentioned in the Act (as the preamble shows) are seditious meetings. But this is not such. Here is no shadow of sedition. Therefore it is not contrary to the Act.’ He replied, ‘I say it is. But besides, your preaching frightens people out of their wits.’ ‘Sir, did you ever hear me preach?’ ‘No.’ ‘How then can you judge of what you never heard?’

‘Sir, by common report.’ ‘Common report is not enough. Give me leave, sir, to ask—is not your name Nash?’ ‘My name is Nash.’ ‘Sir, I dare not judge of you by common report. I believe it is not enough to judge by.’ Here he paused a while, and, having recovered himself, asked: ‘I desire to know what these people come here for?’ On which one replied, ‘Sir, leave him to me. Let an old woman answer him. You, Mr. Nash, take care of your body. We take care of our souls, and for the food of our souls we come here.’”<sup>1</sup>

For the next thirty years Wesley constantly preached at Bath, where he attracted congregations very diverse in character. Walpole, in 1766, actuated by his usual curiosity, sat under him in Lady Huntingdon’s Chapel, that odd little building with its external touches of feeble Gothic which still stands quaintly in the Vineyards. He found him “as evidently an actor as Garrick.” Walpole, more from temperament than opinion, disliked Wesley and his preaching. But his visit to Lady Huntingdon’s Chapel, which she built in 1765, enabled him to leave a picture of a phase of the society of Bath in his time.

“My health advances faster than my amusement. However, I have been at one opera—Mr. Wesley’s. They have boys and girls with charming voices, that sing hymns, in parts, to Scotch ballad tunes; but indeed so long that one would think they were already in eternity and knew how much time they had before

<sup>1</sup> Wesley’s “Journal,” June 5, 1739.

them. The chapel is very neat, with true Gothic windows (yet I am not converted); but I was glad to see that luxury is creeping in upon them before persecution; they have very neat mahogany for branches, and brackets of the same in taste. At the upper end is a broad *hautpas* of four steps, advancing in the middle; at each end of the broadest part are two of *my* eagles (a gift from Walpole to Lady Huntingdon) with red cushions for the parson and clerk. Behind them rise three more steps, in the midst of which is a third eagle for pulpit—scarlet arm-chairs to all three. On either hand a balcony for elect ladies. The rest of the congregation sit on forms. Behind the pulpit, in a dark niche, is a plain table within rails; so you see the throne is for the apostle. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Chapel, preacher, the mingling of the great and the lowly, form a striking picture, showing the influence of this memorable religious movement, the small dimensions of the canvas at Bath enabling us to realise it with great distinctness. The contrast did not escape either the eye or the pen of Anstey, and the lines in which he touched on it, though intended at the moment only to amuse, are essentially true :

“ Where Gaming and Grace  
 Each other embrace,  
 Dissipation and piety meet :—  
 May all, who’ve a notion  
 Of cards or devotion,  
 Make Bath their delightful retreat.”

<sup>1</sup> “ Letters of Horace Walpole ” (edited by Toynbee), vol. vii. p. 94.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LITERARY CIRCLE OF THE CITY OF PLEASURE

REMARKABLE and suggestive as are the general features of social life at Bath between 1700 and 1800, indicative of movements that elsewhere in England were, though in existence, less perceptible, yet a special side of that same society forms an interesting phase in the personal aspect of English literature. All over England are to be found places associated with some famous names, sometimes it is a town, sometimes a village; Gray and Cambridge, Milton and Chalfont St. Giles, the Brontës and Haworth, are every day connected in our minds. But a diverse company of men engaged in literary pursuits spent week after week at Bath, thus uniting the town not with a single personality, but with many, so that Bath becomes in an unparalleled degree a part of the literary life of the eighteenth century.

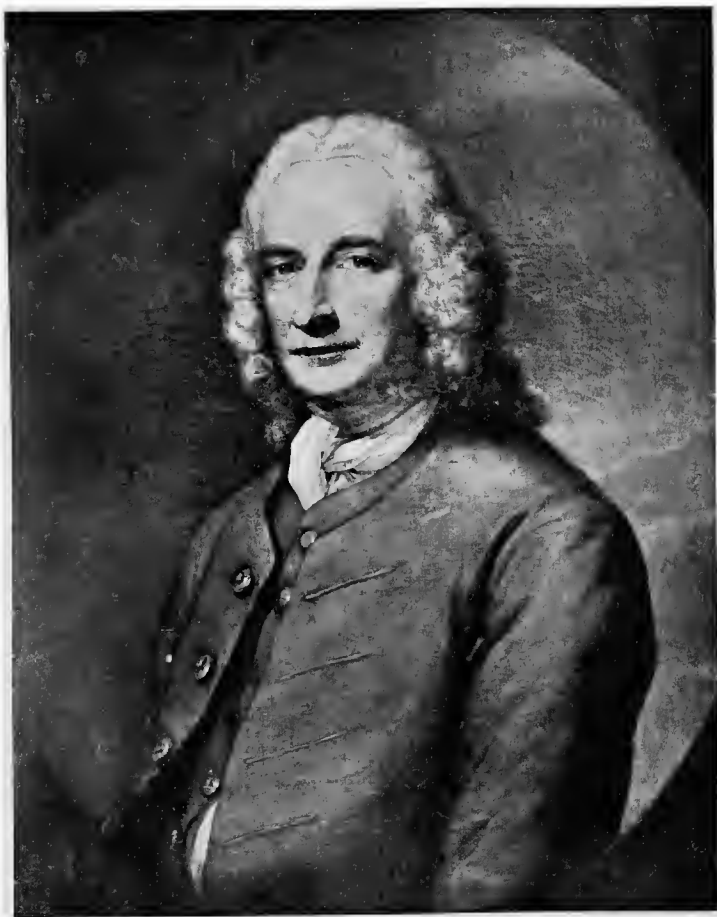
It was chiefly through Ralph Allen<sup>1</sup> that, early in the century, Bath became closely linked with the history of English letters, for he was the constant and intimate friend of Pope, of Fielding, and of Warburton. Pope does not seem to have made Allen's

<sup>1</sup> Peach, "Life and Times of Ralph Allen," pp. 45 *et seq.*

acquaintance till about 1726,<sup>1</sup> though before that time he had paid many visits to Bath for the benefit of his health. Allen's was a remarkable and attractive character, typical of the energetic men who were less numerous and noticeable in the South than in the North of England, where, in the same period, Arkwright and Boulton and Wedgwood were leaders in the industrial revolution. The son of a small innkeeper in Cornwall, Allen entered the post-office at Bath at the age of eighteen and his official zeal caused him to be appointed postmaster when quite a young man. It is instructive, as showing the changes which modern demands were now creating, to note that the means whereby Allen attained to wealth were improvements in postal communication. His project was to establish cross-country means of communication in addition to the north and south lines, which were then the main postal routes. In 1720, being then six-and-twenty, Allen was granted a concession to work the cross-road and the byway letter service in England and Wales for the term of seven years, for which he had to pay the Government an annual rent of £2,000 a year. The success of the enterprise was assured after three doubtful years,

<sup>1</sup> M. Barbeau says 1732, and ascribes the acquaintance to Allen's admiration for Pope's letters—following Warburton. But the first volume of these letters was published in 1726. It is improbable that Allen should not have known Pope slightly from the time of his first visits.

See also Elwin and Courthope's "Life and Letters of Pope," vol. ix. p. 188.



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and the concession was renewed from time to time at increased rentals, Allen meanwhile securing profits which have been put down at from £10,000 to £16,000 a year. He was a man of a broad, kindly, and generous disposition, of great sagacity, discretion, and power, one who, in a larger sphere, might have secured a place as a statesman ; of Bath he was the most conspicuous civil figure, the controller of its municipal affairs. His character, and to some extent his large and bold ideas, are shown by the house which he built about two miles from the town.

Prior Park was erected between 1735 and 1737, but in its entirety, its out-buildings, and its gardens, it was not finished till 1743. This fine mansion, with its columned portico, and its extended colonnades and wings, still dominates to-day, as it did a century and a half ago, the wooded and narrowing glades of Widcombe valley descending towards the Avon from the topmost slopes of the coombe. Though some distance from Bath, Prior Park is connected with the town by the style of its architecture, and is closely associated with the social and literary history of the city. It reminds us strikingly of the movements of the age, for this house—almost a palace—was not built as Castle Howard or Harewood House, to the order of a territorial magnate of long lineage, but to that of one of the middle class, one of the moneyed men who were now coming to the front in English life.

In 1728 Gay and Arbuthnot were with Allen, thus linking the age of Anne with that of the Georges,

and leaving in the Western city memories of the Scriblerus Club, and of the famous literary and political coteries associated with the society of the Court of Anne. In 1734 Pope was at Bath with Bolingbroke, and it is easy to see that Bath was only made bearable to the poet by the pleasant company of those around him; sometimes he was there for two months, sometimes for three, but he was not always complimentary to the place; "to prefer rocks and dirt to flowery meads and lovely Thames, and limestone and fogs to roses and sunshine. When I arrive at these sensations I may settle at Bath, of which I never dreamt, further than to live just out of the sulphurous pit, and at the edge of the fogs at Mr. Allen's for a month or so. I like the place so little that health itself could not drag me thither, though friendship has twice or thrice." Allen had an unquestionable admiration for Pope which flattered his vanity and likewise increased the material comforts of his visit. "He (Allen) has come a hundred miles to fetch me." In his own way Pope repaid Allen's kindness and liberality with affection and regard, which are expressed in his letter to Warburton, in 1741, a letter which gives us a picture not only of his host at Prior Park, but of the place:

"I am here," he says, "in more leisure than I can possibly ever enjoy in my own house, *vacare literis*. It is at this place, that your exhortations may be most effectual to make me resume the studies I have almost laid aside, by perpetual avocations and



ALEXANDER POPE.



dissipations. If it were practicable for you to pass a month or six weeks from home, it is here I could wish to be with you : and if you would attend to the continuation of your own noble work, or unbend to the idle amusement of commenting upon a poet who has no other merit than that of aiming by his moral strokes to merit some regard from such men as advance truth and virtue in a more effectual way ; in either case, this place and this house would be an inviolable asylum to you, from all you would desire to avoid in so public a place as Bath. The worthy man who is the master of it invites you in the strongest terms ; and is one who would treat you with love and veneration rather than what the world calls civility and regard. He is sincere and plainer than almost any man in this world, *antiquis moribus*. If the waters of Bath may be serviceable to your complaints (as I believe from what you have told me of them), no opportunity can ever be better. We are told the Bishop of Salisbury is expected here daily, who I know is your friend, at least, though a bishop, is too much a man of learning to be your enemy. You see I omit nothing to add to the weight in the balance, in which, however, I will not think myself light, since I have known your partiality. You will want no servant here. Your room will be next to mine, and one man will serve us. Here is a library and a gallery 90 feet long to walk in, and a coach whenever you would take the air with me. . . . Is all this a dream or can you make it a reality ? Can you give ear to me ?

*Audistin' ? an me ludit amabilis  
Insania ?*"<sup>1</sup>

Pope's peevish and hypochondriacal nature caused him to break off this admirable friendship a few months before his death, through some petty quarrel between Mrs. Allen and Pope's constant friend and companion, Martha Blount, whose "indecent arrogance," as Johnson called it, was not calculated to make things pleasant for her hostess. Pope at any rate departed from Prior Park in a pet; he wrote to Martha Blount (1743) that he would never set foot in Allen's house again, and he called Warburton a "sneaking parson" for upholding Mrs. Allen. Allen was too sensible and too kindly to allow this foolish quarrel to become a permanent estrangement, and in March of the next year he called on Pope and tried to renew the broken friendship. But he was evidently unsuccessful. "I thought," wrote Pope, "his behaviour a little shy; but in mine I did my very best to show I was quite unconcerned what it was. He departed, inviting himself to come again on his return in about a fortnight." These words have no sound either of cordiality or of renewed affection, and in a few weeks Pope was dead. Allen, who lived till 1764, is commemorated in Pope's verse, and one couplet has become proverbial :

"Let humble Allen, with an awkward shame,  
Do good by stealth and blush to find it fame."

<sup>1</sup> Pope's "Works" (edited by Elwin & Courthope), vol. ix. p. 220

The friendship of Fielding and Allen was simpler and more manly. Fielding, in the middle of the century, was living at the village of Twerton, in a valley some two miles from Prior Park, and he constantly visited the great house, while his sister Sarah had a cottage at Widcombe, the village of which Prior Park was the mansion. Allen allowed her £100 a year, and it was, perhaps, through this friendship that Fielding himself became acquainted with the able and kind-hearted man.<sup>1</sup>

Allen was as generous to Fielding as to his sister, and the honest and straightforward way in which Fielding showed his gratitude remains for all time in his portrait of Squire Allworthy, though the picture does not do justice to Allen's considerable capacity as a man of business and affairs. This side of his character Fielding would have but few opportunities of observing, so that his agreeable and generous portrait is, after all, only a half-truth. But whilst for the moment we meet all these notable men at Prior Park, we must not forget that we are in the environs of Bath, that if they spent part of their days at Allen's stately mansion with its beautiful and commanding outlook over the narrow and wooded Widcombe Valley, they were constantly in Bath, and that it is around the city that these associations cluster.

It is near the end of the century, when the drama of which Sheridan and Miss Linley were the hero

<sup>1</sup> "Life and Times of Ralph Allen," p. 133.

and heroine was enacted at Bath, one full of personal interest, and illustrative of contemporary life and manners there. It is a long story,<sup>1</sup> which cannot here be told in its entirety. Sheridan, whose father had come to Bath, in 1770, to teach elocution, was young, impetuous, idle, enjoying to the full the elements of comedy which he saw around him, when he fell in love with beautiful Elizabeth Linley, whose father was the conductor of the concerts. Child as she was, she had already several suitors, among them Sheridan's elder brother Charles, his friend Halhed—who subsequently made both a reputation and a fortune in the service of the East India Company—and a rich sexagenarian of the name of Long, to whom, in 1771, she was actually, through parental pressure, on the point of being married.

Society at Bath, much engrossed in personal affairs, could not bear the idea of so unequal a marriage, and Foote voiced its opinion when he wrote his play, *The Maid of Bath*, which appeared at the Haymarket Theatre on June 26, 1771. In it Miss Linley figures under the name of Miss Linnett, and her elderly lover as the fool, knave, and miser, Flint, an unfair caricature of a man whose only drawback was his age. The gist of the play is contained in the dénouement, when the engagement is suddenly broken off, and Miss Linnett exclaims, "I beg to remain in the station I am in : my little talents have hitherto received the public protection, nor, whilst

<sup>1</sup> Sichel, "Life of Sheridan," vol. i. pp. 318 *et seq.*



I continue to deserve, am I the least afraid of losing my patrons." The end of the engagement came, in fact, in much the same fashion. Miss Linley loved Richard Sheridan, and, more sensible than her parents, wrote to Long, asking him to break off the engagement. To this request he at once agreed, and quixotically settled £3,000 on the young lady, presenting her also with valuable jewels.

Miss Linley, again, was being tormented by a certain Don Juan of Bath, a Major Mathews, the original of Major Rackett in Foote's play—who did not trouble to disguise the source of this particular character—and to escape from him she took the odd resolve of flying to a convent at St. Quentin. This plan was confided to Sheridan and his sister and, one evening in March of 1772, in company with a female travelling companion and her lover, Miss Linley set off from Bath, leaving both her father and sister Mary safe at a concert. Such a hasty flight, honestly meant as it was, might have ended in some scandal, had not the protecting youth and the helpless girl come to the conclusion that marriage was the best way out of the difficulty. So Richard Sheridan, aged twenty-one, and Elizabeth Linley, aged nineteen, were clandestinely wedded at a village near Calais. This secret union, however, by no means ended the drama. Mrs. Sheridan retired to a convent at Lille, and then to the care of an English family in the same town, whence she was brought back by her father to England.

Meanwhile Mathews, at Bath, was writing angry letters to Sheridan—whose brother was equally wrathful at Miss Linley's flight—and he finally inserted in *The Bath Chronicle* a notice that Sheridan was not a gentleman, and also a challenge. The moment Sheridan—still in France—received the letters he hurried back, found Mathews in London, and obtained from his opponent an explanation which appeased his anger. But on arriving at Bath he purchased a copy of the *Chronicle* and, hastily returning to London, fought a duel with Mathews in a tavern, a rough-and-tumble kind of fight, which produced an apology from his rival. Mathews retired to Wales, but presently came back to Bath, where he gave his own version of the duel. A second encounter, on July 2, on Kingsdown Hill, was the result.

It was not at this moment the season at Bath, and Miss Linley, as she still was to the world, was singing at a concert at Oxford. On her way home she heard of Sheridan's wound, and insisted on seeing him, saying she was his wife. But her words were not taken seriously. Sheridan himself made no avowal of the marriage; on the contrary, he actually promised his father that he would never marry Miss Linley, and was sent off by him to Waltham Abbey, where he remained till the following spring. Miss Linley departed for Tunbridge Wells. All kinds of intermediate difficulties, sorrows, estrangements, and concealments followed, until Mr. Linley relented, and on

April 13, 1773, Sheridan and Miss Linley, as we still may call her, were remarried in London.

It is a curious story, valuable as a graphic illustration of people and of life at Bath. All sorts and conditions of persons were mixed up in it. Bath society was in a state of excitement over this adventure of two young and interesting people, and the affair was important enough to be sent as a piece of news from Bath to *The London Chronicle*, wherein it is thus reported: "Bath, March 23, Wednesday.—The eldest Miss Linley, of this city, justly celebrated for her musical abilities, set off with Mr. Sheridan, junior, on a matrimonial expedition to Scotland."

Some time after the Sheridan romance—in 1780—Fanny Burney made her memorable visit to Bath. It was two years after the publication of "Evelina," by which she had become a celebrity. She arrived under the escort and as the guest of Mrs. Thrale, who, wealthy, clever, and respectable, represented an important section of the women who delighted in Bath. Mrs. Thrale had been a visitor before, in 1776, and much of the remainder of her life was passed in Bath; there also, in 1784, her marriage to Piozzi took place. Thenceforth she was a frequent resident, until, after her second husband's death in 1809, she settled there till the end of her life in 1821—thus, the intimate friend of Johnson, and the hostess of Burke, uniting the eighteenth century, and Bath in particular, with a later epoch.

Fanny Burney's quick intelligence and her power of accurate description enabled her to depict with easy gaiety and simple truth the character of life at Bath. Her pleasure in bright talk, and her instant perception alike of wit and of stupidity, enabled her to bring into relief many features of society at Bath—its good as well as its bad points—for beneath all its frivolity was a stratum of intellectual life. A faint imitation of the salons of Madame du Deffand and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse was noticeable in some of the parties at Bath. But the English character is not suited to the enjoyment of a society at once intellectual and worldly; philosophy and gossip do not amalgamate on this side of the Channel, and the reunions at Bath Easton, where Lady Miller received guests in her pleasant villa, and where poetical compositions dropped into a classical urn were read, and prizes awarded, after the example of Madame d'Houdetot at Sannois, amidst the chatter of a garden-party, brought the intellectual side of Bath society into some ridicule. "He was a blockhead for his pains," said Johnson, in his blunt way, of a gentleman who attended these parties. Yet, in spite of their exaggerations and affectations, they were harmless enough, and these gatherings must in some respects have been pleasant. In imagination we may reconstruct the scene, for we can still see the house with its classical ornamentation and the pillars of the grottoes, and the smooth lawns sloping to the high road from Bath. Here—



MRS. THRALE (PIOZZI).



"Lady Miller once a fortnight gave out a subject for poetical composition, on which, when the company was assembled, those whom the Muses, or perhaps vanity, or the love of fame, had influenced, produced their performances, and put them into an elegant antique marble vase brought from Rome, and placed on a pedestal in the bow window ; when the company were seated, some young nymph put in her delicate arm and took out a single poem, which the author, or some one who either had, or fancied he had, an agreeable elocution, read to the assembly. When in this manner the whole collection was gone through, the gentlemen retired into a contiguous apartment, where, amidst a profusion of jellies, sweetmeats, ice-creams and the like, they decided on the merits of the several performances, from which they selected three, which were deemed the best, and of course entitled to prizes, which her ladyship distributed to the respective authors ; a pompous bouquet of flowers to the first, a myrtle wreath to the second, and a sprig of myrtle to the third. These were then usually presented by the successful candidate to some lady, who wore them in her hair or her bosom the next evening to the publick rooms."<sup>1</sup>

We may smile at these proceedings, but they brought many people to Bath,<sup>2</sup> and they indicate

<sup>1</sup> Graves, "The Triflers," p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> "I counted one morning above fifty carriages drawn up in line from Bath Easton, and was at one time present at it, with four Duchesses" (Graves, "The Triflers," p. 13).

better than any description can do, the growth of gentler manners in certain sections of English society, the desire for recreation other than the sport and the boisterous evenings of Squire Western and the cards which then formed the chief indoor amusement all over the country.

During the pleasant season of late spring and early summer, of April, May, and June, when Bath and the fertile valley of the Avon were at their best, Fanny Burney was also at her best, ingenuously delighting in her own success and recording in her diary, with a quite delightful naïveté, the remarks, often ridiculous, fulsome, and exaggerated, which were made to her on a book which was in the hands and the mouth of every one. The incidents of her day were trivial; no one went to Bath to lead a strenuous life. With Miss Burney it was breakfast at home with Mrs. Thrale or with a friend, a stroll in the meadows, perhaps; after a two o'clock dinner at another house, a concert, or a walk to the Belvedere, or an evening party at which cards and tea were mingled with talk, as depicted in Hogarth's "Assembly at Wanstead House" (1728). Sometimes there was a call to be made, for evening visits were much in vogue, or else a theatre: "We all went to the play to see an actress, she (Miss Bowdler) is strangely fond of Mrs. Siddons in 'Belvidere.'" But, instead of admiring her, they all fell in love with a second-rate actor. Theatre or party, or whatever was the occupation of the evening, it was sure to be a



pleasant ending to a day which, if its occurrences were uneventful, was from morning to night sociable and bright, and was more like a *fête-champêtre* by Watteau than a landscape by Gainsborough.

Miss Burney moved among "tonish" ladies, among the "witlings"; she tells of a *tête-à-tête* now with a bishop, now with a clever young peer, and now with one of those naval officers who were then the heroes of the day, and of whom I shall speak on a later page. She was one of the celebrities in a constantly moving crowd, in a society well-to-do, a little clerical, and for the most part middle class, in which wealth, wit, and respectability were amusingly united, and she describes, with admirable vivacity and truth, the society of Bath towards the end of the century, indicating not only the cosmopolitanism of the place, but the mental atmosphere and the current ideas of an interesting portion of the English people. We see before us the varied throng—politicians and capitalists, artists and actors, divines and sailors, women of wit from town, and hoydens from the countryside. All mingled freely, and without social restraint, not in the least aware that they exemplified drastic national changes, and deep social evolutions in silent progress.

"Society in the eighteenth century," it has been well said, "in spite of the very rigorous and active controversies upon the questions which divided it, was in the main self-satisfied, complacent, and comfortable," and nowhere more so than at Bath, where

the tendencies of the century were focused. We note also the vigorous exercise of English art, the art of Gainsborough and Lawrence, of portraiture and landscape, fostered by a society which was beginning to appreciate the gifts of the painter—who had in the past been generally a foreigner, and whose patrons had seldom been other than royal or noble. Now the great middle-class were becoming amateurs, and the purchaser of a picture was of the same grade that across the North Sea had sustained the Dutch artists of an earlier age. All these features Fanny Burney's diary reveals to us, and it is for this reason that her depiction of Bath has so permanent a value.

Of the last phase of the literary society of Bath Miss Austen is the central and attractive figure. She describes the city as it passes from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century—from that marked intervening epoch between the old age and the modern, between England of the Stuarts and of the Revolution, to England as it now is. Miss Austen unites Bath in its zenith to Bath in its decline. She lived there from 1801 to 1805, and in "Northanger Abbey" and in "Persuasion" are narrated the sayings and doings of Bath just before it descended into a commonplace spa, losing its distinctive features from causes to which I have already referred. Miss Austen's Bath is made agreeable by her own personal charm, and by the delicacy of her art. "She saw nothing worse around her than a good deal of frivolity, a little dissipation, and a touch of vulgarity"—faults of

the surface only, fit not for condemnation but for the gentle ridicule which, while it criticises, does not wound, and which recognises that there may be sins of manners and of taste compatible with sterling worth.

In Miss Austen's day Bath, though declining, had unquestionably become more refined, its tone had improved, and decency was more regarded. Young Thorpe, for instance, though with manners between those of a lout and a groom, was many degrees better than the brutal young fox-hunting squire—a youthful squire Western, brother of the charming Narcissa, whom Smollett describes. What remarkable products of the age were these damsels of seventeen, who blushed with downcast eyes when their lovers spoke, and yet heard without a change of colour the grossest conversation. Bath presented then, as it had before, examples of certain phases of national character outside and beyond its bounds. But Miss Austen possessed to so great a degree the story-telling power that we are apt to lose touch with the locality in the interest of the novel. She had no moral to point as had Richardson and Fielding, her object was to please, and it is for our present purpose the chief interest of Miss Austen's connection with Bath, that she places two of her stories there which, like her other works, are examples of the uprising of the modern novel.

One thus quits the literary circle of Bath in her agreeable company. The last phase of its historical

importance is engraved for posterity on her charming pages, which will ever recall that remarkable society, so varied, and so gay, which was once concentrated in Bath, the only City of Pleasure that England has ever seen—the peculiar product and possession of the eighteenth century.

## CHAPTER VII

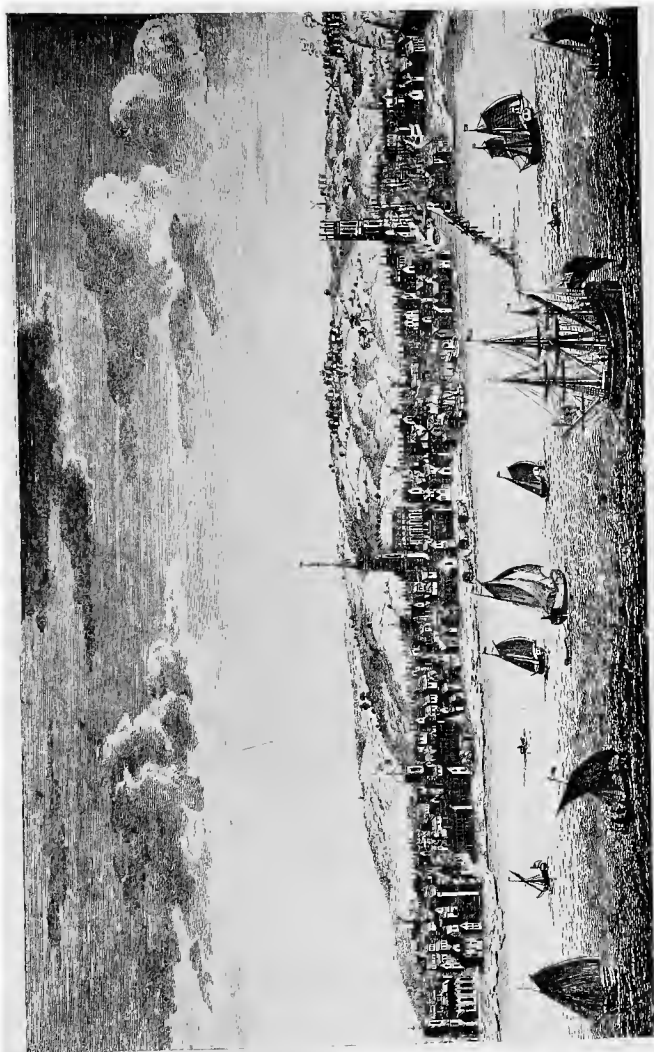
### THE SEAPORT

WE have come to the third and last of the three pre-eminent cities of England in the eighteenth century—a city which may emphatically and truly be called The Seaport. No town could differ more from Bath than Liverpool, wherein men's minds and lives were concentrated with strict and purposeful energy on the daily pursuit of success in maritime commerce and adventure. Adventurers indeed, in one form or another, personal or financial, most of the inhabitants of Liverpool were—the spirit of adventure permeated the town. It is true that London was also a port, and veritably an important port, but—and this makes all the difference—far more than a seaport. The ships which sought London pushed their slow way up the devious course of the Thames until they reached the narrow anchorage below old London Bridge. But the craft which were moored here had long left the sea behind. They lay to their anchors, picturesque additions to an animated scene, adding to the business of a capital occupied with almost every interest under the sun. But ships, crews, and cargoes formed only some

elements of a marvellous and miscellaneous activity, and the sailors who wandered from the river bank were soon lost in a varied crowd. London as a port was in fact merged in London as a capital. Bristol—a larger town than Liverpool—also was a port, and at Bristol seamen and shipowners were less swamped than in London by a throng of men of differing occupations. Bristol, however, lay ten miles up a narrow and tortuous stream, and was the chief town of a rich valley of the West, its position in a fruitful agricultural district giving it a distinctly inland atmosphere. Of its inhabitants only a part—though a large one—was concerned with the sea; its interests were in fact numerous. Yet London and Bristol only were at all comparable with Liverpool as ports; elsewhere, as at Newcastle and Chester, ships arrived and departed, but this commerce was trifling in comparison with that of Liverpool.

It had long been the obvious destiny of Liverpool to become the representative seaport of England—a destiny which from the thirteenth century had slowly, and with fluctuating fortunes, been evolved, until, in the eighteenth century, the town definitely and finally attained the noteworthy position of the chief seaport of the kingdom.

From the beginning of its history Liverpool, by reason of its geographical situation, had been singularly isolated from the rest of England; it had been content with its maritime highway, and it had not troubled to come into closer touch with the



LIVERPOOL.





inland portions of the kingdom. For it the sea was no divider. As the French Canadian habitant of to-day, who dwells in the white villages which nestle under the solitary and impassable hills which border the St. Lawrence, looks on that majestic stream not as an immense barrier, but only as connecting him with his distant countrymen, so the people of Liverpool regarded the Mersey and the waters beyond it. To them their outlet was the river, not the miry and impassable tracks which led from Liverpool across the bleakest of countrysides to the towns beyond. The proud words which surmount the entrance to the office of a famous shipping company on the Alsterdam at Hamburg might with good reason have been used by the merchants of the Mersey. "The world is my field," would aptly have summarized the aims and the ambitions of the people of Liverpool.

Its particular character as a remote seaport,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The isolation of Liverpool may be exemplified by the fact that in 1775 there was only one letter-carrier for the whole town, that in 1753 the only means of communication with London was by stage wagons, the quickest of which took ten days on the journey. Gentlemen travelled on horseback, ladies in carriages. In 1760 the first stage coach to London was advertised; one—euphoniously known as the London and Liverpool Flying Machine—made the journey in forty-eight hours. In 1784 mail coaches were started, the journey occupying from thirty to forty-eight hours, but at first they carried only four passengers beside the guard and coachman, each of whom was armed with a blunderbuss. It was not until 1760 that the high road from Liverpool to Warrington was made practicable for carriages. Goods were chiefly conveyed by sea between Liverpool, London, and other English ports by regular traders, which also carried a few passengers.

which still existed in the eighteenth century, had kept Liverpool free from many political troubles, it had given independence and self-reliance to its citizens and its sailors, but it had made it less sensitive to the larger movements of the age. No English community of the eighteenth century was so little responsive to the new feelings and aspirations of the times—the desire for intellectual freedom, for higher standards of social and municipal life—or so little conscious of the growing unrest of general European society.

In the middle of the century, however, Liverpool began to lose something of the isolation, of which I have already spoken, commercially at least if not socially. It now came into more frequent and closer contact with the inland districts, with the rising manufacturing towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire, with the factories of the Midlands, the salt mines of Cheshire and the pastures of Shropshire, by a network of canals—waterways extending like a fan from the commercial city on the estuary of the Mersey, whence the products of the inland parts of England were carried by sailing ships to all parts of the world near and far. Here, on a great arm of the sea, the town was in constant contact with the ocean, whose moods were reflected day by day on the surface of the tides as they flowed and ebbed by the piers and landing-places of the town. The waves, the fog, the shimmer on the waters of the estuary, the moist gales from the Atlantic,

all told of the sea. In front, the West Indiaman and the coaster lay swinging to their anchors, with furled sails, whilst, with a Western wind, the merchantman and the privateer with well-filled canvas broke the wave-touched horizon. Nowhere in the town, or in its proximity, was the sense of the sea, and the perception of the traffic of the sea, absent. It entered into every part of the daily life of the people. The bleak marshes—now covered by docks or dwellings—which spread northwards towards the coast, were swept by sea winds, were the adjuncts of the estuary, and the city itself did not differ in general character from the town which stood on the banks of the Mersey in the Middle Ages. It had increased in size, but it had still all the characteristics of the primitive seaport, of a purely waterside town, for the streets extended only a short distance from the Mersey, and were never out of sight of the tideway. Narrow and irregular, badly built, with mean and dirty courts behind them, constructed of a dingy brick, which gave a peculiarly sombre colouring to the town, they mostly led towards the waterside; to the shipyards—for many fine ships and frigates were constructed here—to the strand, with the coasters lying aground and the small boats hauled up, to the ferries, and to the fishermen's nets drying in the sun. In these streets, offices, private residences, and shops were intermingled.

The merchant was a homely and a simple man, unostentatious and careful, and if he emulated the

Venetian as a trader he made no attempt to vie with him as a patron of art. He had few pleasures, little ambition beyond his business, and small occupation outside his counting-house; but this extreme absorption in commerce was one cause of his commercial success. It was quite in accordance with this order of things that the merchant should dwell over, or hard by, his place of business, and his wife bought her dresses in the same street in which her husband daily conducted his affairs. Not till towards the end of the century did the merchant begin to live at a distance from his work, and in the rural outskirts of the city. A miscellaneous crowd of persons and vehicles filled the thoroughfares—men, women and children, carts, carriages and coaches. After 1760, one might have watched the London coach starting from the Golden Talbot in Water Street, and turning, have perceived the canvas and the crowded deck of a privateer sailing down the river. Passing wagons heaped with merchandise toiled up and down the badly paved street from the wharves, and from the higher land outside the city the course of the Mersey and the sea in the distance were visible, dominating the landscape.

In their pleasures the people of the town were often brought in contact with the sea, even race-meetings were held on the smooth, sandy surface of Crosby Marsh, on one side of which was the open sea, "which," writes an enthusiastic local chronicler—describing a meeting in the summer of 1774—"was covered with

sails, sloops, wherries, and boats loaded with passengers discharged at the foot of the race ground; to the east were the villages and the Leeds Canal, with sloops and boats and colours flying.”<sup>1</sup> When the sons and daughters of the merchants went to dances or card-parties, the Exchange was the rendezvous. Derrick, Master of the Ceremonies at Bath, the successor of Beau Nash, visited Liverpool in 1760, and he described to a correspondent,<sup>2</sup> among the other sights of the place, the Exchange—the centre of the life of the town. This building had an especial interest for Derrick, for it had been designed by the elder and the younger Wood, the architects of Bath. He tells of the fine apartments in the upper part of the building, wherein the Corporation transacted public business, and continues, “the assembly room, which is also upstairs, is grand, spacious, and finely illuminated: here is a meeting once a fortnight to dance and play cards.” It was in a room above this very apartment that, in the daytime, the men of the gathering had made charter parties, and settled maritime losses on policies of insurance. The dinner-table told the same tale. Rum, flavoured with limes from the West Indies, brought in the host’s ship, was a favourite drink; the board was plentifully supplied with fresh sea fish, taken by men who dried their nets on the adjacent strand, and you were often reminded of the prosperous slave trade by the presence

<sup>1</sup> Williamson’s *Liverpool Advertiser*, July 5, 1774.

<sup>2</sup> Baines, “History of Liverpool,” 426.

of a negro butler, who had perhaps been imported with other tropical produce, or purchased at auction in the town.<sup>1</sup>

It was to the African trade of which this black man reminds us that Liverpool owed much pre-eminence as a port during the last half of the century. Admitted to the slave trade in 1730, she soon distanced her two competitors, London and Bristol.<sup>2</sup> Success in all maritime affairs was unquestionably due to the superior capacity of the merchants of Liverpool as men of business, and of its captains as seamen. Each possessed inherited qualities which, in the course of years, had become more and more perfected, forming a common and remarkable heritage of the people of the town.

As the century advanced, the African ventures of the Liverpool merchant became still more remunerative and the prosperity of the town apparently further bound up with that of the trade. Liverpool ships sailed from the Mersey to the African coast, where negroes were purchased either by a system of barter or for cash, the average cost of a

<sup>1</sup> Slaves were sold in Liverpool until 1772, when it was held that a slave became a free man when he touched English soil. In Williamson's *Advertiser* for September 12, 1766, is the following advertisement: "To be sold at the Exchange Coffee House, in Water Street, this day, the 12th instant, September, at 1 o'clock precisely, eleven negroes imported by the *Angola*. . . ."

<sup>2</sup> From 1783-1793, 878 Liverpool ships carried from Africa to the West Indies, 303,737 slaves. In the decade, 1795-1804, London ships carried 46,405 slaves, Bristol ships 10,718, and Liverpool ships 323,777.

slave being twenty-five pounds. The vessel, her cargo obtained, set out for the West Indies, where this living freight on an average fetched fifty pounds per head, and finally the ship completed the third stage of the round voyage by returning to Liverpool laden with the produce of Jamaica or of the Barbadoes.

Half apprehensive<sup>1</sup> and half ashamed, keenly alive to the profits of the trade, desperately afraid of being ruined if they were lost, Liverpool presently relinquished a merely defensive attitude, and towards the end of the century—from 1780—showed an active and determined opposition to the increasing national feeling against the slave trade. This traffic—said a petition of the Corporation in 1788—“had lately been unjustly reprobated as impolitic and inhuman.” The merchant, sitting in his counting-house, did not personally witness the cruelties and sufferings attendant on this trade in human beings, but he was not unaware of them. Such indifference to human suffering prolonged an indifference to cruelty and suffering of all kinds at home, a state of mind not

<sup>1</sup> Free trade, or, in other words, non-interference with the slave trade, was the watchword, the merit of which was claimed by both political parties. Picton’s “Memorials of Liverpool” (1761). The following from an election rhyme in 1790 exemplifies the popular feeling towards the end of the century :

“If the slave trade had gone, there’s an end to our lives,  
Beggars all we must be, our children and wives,  
No ships from our ports their proud sails e’er would spread,  
And our streets grown with grass, where the cows might be fed.”

confined to Liverpool, and which was made more noticeable as the century advanced by its contrast with the increasing comforts and ameliorations of social life. Sailors who took an actual part in carrying on the trade were necessarily directly brutalised and, though steadfast and courageous at sea, added to the degradation of the lower classes in the town. Nowhere else in England did this element exist to the same extent, and nowhere was it so dominating in its evil influence as in Liverpool.

In the more important concerns of municipal life the citizen was also reminded that the prosperity of the community depended on the sea and its commerce. If a man wished to become a merchant he had to be a freeman of the town, and for this privilege he paid from £20 to £30, and the town dues, which were another source of income to the Corporation, rose and fell with the fluctuations of commerce.

The pious benefactor owed his affluence to the sea. The Blue Coat School, which still remains a flourishing institution, was founded by Bryan Blundell, who, in the early part of the century, owned and commanded his own ship. In his praiseworthy aims he was assisted by Robert Stithe, a clergyman, to whom Captain Blundell once said that he hoped "to be giving him something every voyage for the school." These words were spoken before 1713, and many years later, about 1750, Blundell was able to congratulate himself that he had been treasurer of the institution



for thirty-seven years, during which time, he added, "more than four hundred children have been put out apprentices, mostly to sea, in which business many of them are masters and some mates of ships; several of them have become benefactors to the school."<sup>1</sup> From the Blue Coat School to the fore-castle was the natural transition of promising Liverpool boys, and from the fore-castle to the quarter-deck.

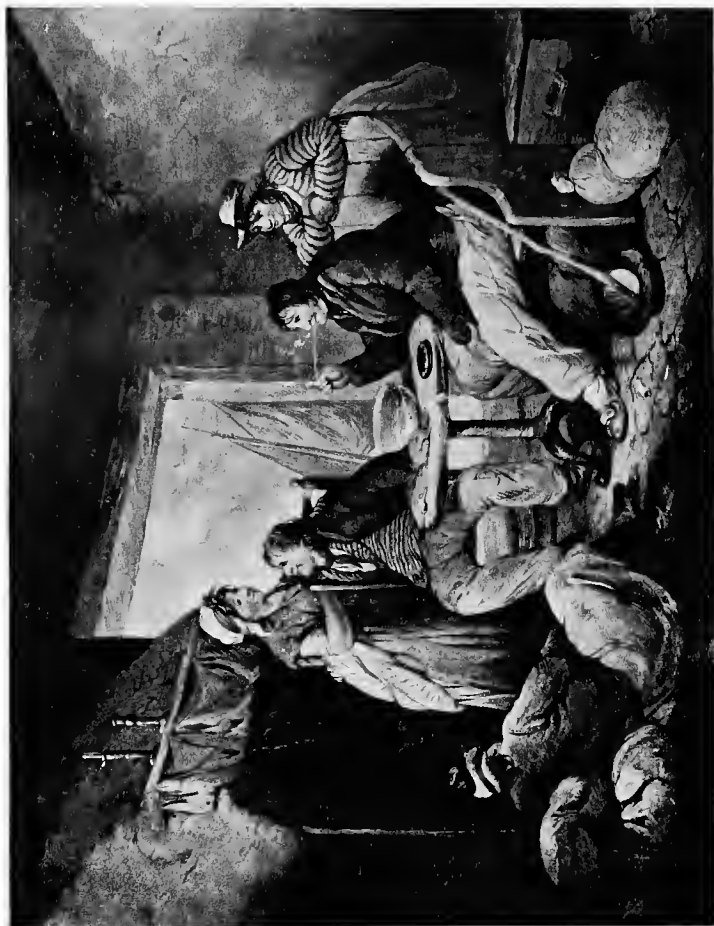
After long months at sea the mariners returned to their homes by the Mersey—from tedious voyages to the coast of Africa, from arduous struggles across the North Atlantic to the American colonies—or from frequent passages to Irish ports. These resolute and rugged men were, even at home, separated from the rest of their countrymen, and, when they left their city it was always to resume their calling on the ocean. With them, when they set sail, went the thoughts, the hopes, and the fears of all who stayed on shore who looked across the seas toward the West, not to England over the bleak pastures and mosses which lay behind the city.

These were the men who, for the latter part of the century, from the commencement of the Seven Years' War, in 1756, to the end of the Napoleonic War, manned the Liverpool privateers. Their feats of daring, and the value of the prizes which they carried into the Mersey, became household stories

<sup>1</sup> Narrative of Mr. Bryan Blundell cited in Baines' "History of Liverpool," p. 406.

in every home in the town. Press gangs were compelled to obtain hands for the King's ships with brutal violence, but at this very time the gangways of the privateers were thronged with men anxious to seek their fortune under some courageous captain. However rash and headstrong the gentlemen seamen, as it was often the fashion to call them, may have been, captains of the privateers were men not only of desperate courage, but patient, wary, and farseeing commanders. The hand-to-hand sea fight, the constant watch for the enemy's merchantmen or frigates in fair weather or in foul, the decision to fight or to fly, were daily elements in a life which produced a magnificent race of seamen, worthy successors of the Elizabethan rovers. But it was one little appreciative of the tameness of home-life, or of the aims and the ideas of a home-staying population. These men, however, gave to the people of Liverpool a new and peculiar spirit of personal adventure, of pecuniary speculation, and of militant patriotism which, in the eighteenth century, permeated all classes of the community of the seaport.

The merchant who fitted out a privateer waited anxiously for the hour when his ship should return, sometimes in triumph with a rich merchant-vessel in its wake, sometimes with battered hull and damaged sails, scarcely able to beat up the estuary; sometimes captain and crew had earned sufficient prize-money to keep them in comfort, almost in affluence, for



"THE FLOWING BOWL" OR "SAILOR'S RETURNED."



the rest of their lives<sup>1</sup>—if they did not spend it on drink and on gambling. The *Anson*, of one hundred and fifty tons, with an armament of sixteen carriage-guns and twenty-four swivels, manned by a crew of one hundred men, which sailed from Liverpool on July 1, 1756, soon after the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, having captured a West Indiaman and cargo valued at £20,000, was one of those which soon made an enormous profit. But there was also another end to the adventure, and sometimes the crew came ashore weary and wounded, lamenting the loss of gallant comrades.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes neither ship nor crew ever again saw the Mersey, and whilst those who had risked their capital suffered a financial disaster, sorrow and mourning touched the homes of the seamen.

During the American Revolutionary War, which ended in 1782, Liverpool merchants fitted out more than

<sup>1</sup> "A box of diamonds was discovered on Friday on board the Carnatic French East Indiaman, which has arrived in the river, to the no small satisfaction of the captors" (Williamson's *Liverpool Advertiser*, November 27, 1778).

<sup>2</sup> "The best contested battle fought by any of the Liverpool privateers, during this war (the American War of Independence), was that fought by the *Watt*, Captain Coulthard, and the American ship, *Trumbull*, Captain Nicholson. The armament of the *Watt* was 32 twelve- and six-pounders, that of the *Trumbull* 36 twelve-pounders. They fought for several hours often within pistol shot of each other, and were both of them pretty nearly knocked to pieces. The *Watt* lost eleven men, killed; the *Trumbull* its captain and fifty-seven men. It was a drawn battle, and both the vessels were nearly sinking when they got back into port: the *Watt* into Liverpool, the *Trumbull* into New London" (Williamson's *Liverpool Advertiser*, July 27, 1780).

a hundred and twenty privateers and a list of seventy-one of the principal ships shows that the aggregate of their crews was 4,439 men. The whole fleet was not at sea at the same moment, so that these four thousand and odd men could not have been at sea at one time but, on the other hand, the ships enumerated in the list were not the whole of the Liverpool privateers. In 1771 it was computed that there were 5,967 seamen employed in Liverpool ships, which number, it may be assumed, includes those who formed part of the crews of the privateers. The total population of Liverpool may be taken in 1771 to have been about 36,000, so that about one-sixth of the population was engaged in a seafaring life, on board merchant ships or privateers.

This proportion is of one class only interested in maritime adventures, and, permanently resident on shore were the shipowners, the merchants, the shipbuilders, the ship chandlers, and others, a diverse community, each one, continually following the fortunes of ships cruising near and far, his eyes fixed on the sea, his thoughts ever upon it, hoping, expecting, fearing, watching for the favourable wind, trembling as the gale swept through the narrow streets, patiently awaiting news of a protecting convoy, welcoming the fortunate privateer. The frequenters of coffee-taverns in Fleet Street might read of a lucky capture, or of the wreck of a West Indiaman. To them it was impersonal news, and news which scarcely at all reached the Cathedral towns, or the agricultural

communities of the home counties. To men and women in Liverpool these daily tidings were of continuous interest, and implied fortune or disaster, a happy home-coming or the patient bearing of a common sorrow.

These maritime events, these thrilling adventures in near and distant seas, knit the people of Liverpool together by a common bond, one unfelt in the rest of England. They were isolated yet in touch with the wider world, provincial yet universal, a community unlike any other in the land. The aspirations of the new citizen of the manufacturing towns had small place in the mind of the Liverpool citizen, who, when he was not counting the profit he had accumulated in an African—it might be of a Greenland—venture, was patiently hoping that the privateer in which he had a share would bring in a valuable prize. His thoughts, were he rich or poor, were set upon the sea, as were those of all with whom he came in contact day by day. To him the things which interested and occupied his fellow-countrymen away from the sea were of secondary importance, and to most of these, if they thought of him at all, he was somewhat of an enigma, a person with peculiarities and aims which they could not share. He was essentially unpolitical, but called himself a Whig, because he was hostile to the religion of the Stuarts, and because they were inclined to tamper with his civic and commercial freedom. Unlike the citizens of Manchester, who raised a regiment, he disliked the

war with the American Colonies because it interfered with shipping business ; he remonstrated against it and complained bitterly, but consoled himself by fitting out privateers, in the hope of balancing the loss of freights and commissions by the sale of captured ships and cargoes.

It was not till the end of the century that this city, with its faint Whig proclivities in politics, and its puritanical tendencies in religion, became the Tory though Low Church stronghold it has since remained. Modern Low Churchmen are Puritans under another name, and Liverpool Whigs became Tories from two causes, each clearly visible in the eighteenth century—opposition to the abolition of the Slave Trade, which was accomplished by a Whig Ministry, and a belligerent anti-French spirit created and fostered by the practice of privateering—a spirit which caused men in Liverpool to regard the Whigs as in sympathy with their enemies in France. Nor was the long isolation of the place without its influence. The revolution in ideas which began in the eighteenth century, and which has been called by so many different names in relation to its effect on various forms of human activity, was in politics essentially Liberal in its character. Liverpool, standing, as I have described, apart from the rest of England, would, in any case, have inclined to the party of inaction, even without the influences which have just been indicated.

But the peculiar political opinions of Liverpool in



the nineteenth century are only connected with Liverpool the seaport of the eighteenth century, in so far as they were the product of remarkable elements in commercial life during the years in which we are surveying the English scene. Of this scene, Liverpool the seaport is for many the most suggestive part. Steadily working out its destiny through the ages, it had in this epoch reached a singularly distinctive and emphatic place, which it has since retained. Its isolation, its comparative indifference to influences at work in other parts of England, to the claims of literature, of art, and of social improvement, its energetic and patient absorption in a single occupation which brought its citizens into touch with the most distant parts of the globe, gave it a permanent civic idiosyncrasy. Without Liverpool England in the eighteenth century would have wanted a conspicuous and interesting element in its polity, a picturesque and unique feature of the scene.

NOTE.—The chief authorities for this chapter are: "A History of Liverpool," by Ramsay Muir; "Memorials of Liverpool," by Sir James A. Picton; "The History of Liverpool," by Thomas Baines; "History of the Liverpool Privateers, with an Account of the Liverpool Slave Trade," by Gomer Williams.



## *PART II*

### CONSPICUOUS GROUPS

WE now pass to a survey of the conspicuous figures on the Scene who may be placed in a few groups with certain characteristics peculiar to the century. It is only with these bodies of the people—as distinct from mere individuals—which illustrate the age, and in which the effect of the time is clearly shown, that we are concerned. For instance, the lawyer, the doctor, and the soldier of the eighteenth century were, making allowances for technical knowledge, social changes, and dress, much the same then as they are to-day, and a description of them would apply in most respects to them now, except in some superficial aspects.

In the foreground of the picture is a very small but brilliant and striking group; beyond, in the middle distance, we note increasing masses of energetic and industrious men, who will presently cover a much larger part of the Scene, and in the background are the poverty-stricken parsons, and the sad figures of the peasantry—helpless victims of irresistible time-movements.



## CHAPTER VIII

### THE NOBILITY

IN England, as in France, in the eighteenth century the Nobility formed numerically a very small class. Hardly indeed can this little group of men be called a class, since one large room would have contained them all. At the accession of George III. there were only one hundred and seventy-four British peers, twelve of whom being Roman Catholics were then incapacitated from sitting in Parliament. As the century advanced these numbers were slightly increased, for during the first ten years of the reign of George III. forty-two British peers were created, and during the administration of Lord North thirty commoners were added to the roll of the English Nobility.<sup>1</sup>

Politically and socially, the influence of the Nobility was out of all proportion to its numbers. The nobleman was in fact the most conspicuous figure on the Scene. Never was he so powerful, or so many-sided in England as in the century which preceded his political decline—a slow decline which was

<sup>1</sup> Lecky, "History of England in the Eighteenth Century," vol. v. p. 26.

in marked contrast to the sudden destruction which overtook the aristocracy of France at the Revolution. From the fact of the union in his person of pride of race and pride of possession, the peer continued, long after the century closed, to have political and social weight ; but neither before nor since has he possessed to a like extent the universal influence which he exercised all over the country in the eighteenth century. We meet with him in every part of England, and in every form of society—in the rural districts, where his domains and his presence dominated the county, at Westminster among the politicians, mingling also with the habitués and pleasure-seekers of St. James's Street, of Ranelagh, and of Vauxhall, and he was a frequent figure in the Courts of European capitals. It is always difficult, when environed by contemporary society, to realise, with anything approaching vividness, the actuality of real life in the past ; and it is never more so than when—in this democratic age—we try to picture at this period the aristocracy—so few in numbers—in its supreme and varied activities.

The term aristocracy meant in England in the eighteenth century a class of hereditary and titled landowners—the descendants as a class, and actually by family in some cases, as in those of the Percys and the Talbots—of the feudal barons of the middle ages. It was from their position as great landed proprietors that the power of the peers primarily sprung, but to this element of influence were, in the eighteenth century, added a number of others.



THOMAS PELHAM, FIRST DUKE OF NEWCASTLE.





Political conditions combined with social circumstances to make the aristocracy as a class inevitably pre-eminent. The nobleman possessed not only rank but riches, and he was in the main the only capitalist. He had vast landed possessions—such as those of the Duke of Devonshire, whom we may take as a significant example of his class in this age—when stocks and shares scarcely existed. The riches of the new middle class were rapidly accumulating, but this section of English society was only growing when the nobleman was governing, whilst the nabobs, as those who had made fortunes in the East were contemptuously called, were not only few in numbers but, socially and politically, were still without much influence. Land—especially land which was an hereditary possession—was the most potent and impressive form of riches, and it produced in an unusual degree in the nobility of the eighteenth century a union of the power of wealth with that of political and social influence.

But the nobleman not only possessed great estates, he was often also the proprietor of one or more pocket boroughs. He could thus affect legislation and policy in both Houses of Parliament—in the House of Lords by his own vote, and in the House of Commons indirectly, by the vote of his nominee who, in the political slang of the time, was the mouth of his patron, as Barré was of Lord Shelburne, and Rigby of the Duke of Bedford.

Besides his actual parliamentary nominees, a peer with this power was surrounded by numbers of followers anxious to oblige and serve him, hoping by so doing for opportunities to serve themselves. "'Tis a surprise to me," wrote Lady Mary Wortley Montague to Mr. Wortley, in 1714, "that you cannot make sure of some borough, when so many of your friends bring in Parliament men without expense."<sup>1</sup> Men who held a seat in Parliament "without expense" had to pay for the privilege in something else than cash; they were the political servants of an aristocratic master who naturally looked down on "parliament men" whose legislative existence depended on his own will and pleasure. "I received," wrote George Selwyn, in the most natural and matter-of-fact manner, "a letter from Lord Carlisle, who, as he says, finds it necessary to recommend Gregg for the remainder of this Parliament to the borough of Morpeth." Apparently, Gregg was a mere stop-gag representative of this northern constituency placed in Parliament for a short time by Lord Carlisle, for Selwyn adds, "I should have been glad that the return could have been of the same person, whoever he may be, who is designed to represent it at the ensuing and general election."<sup>2</sup> And, in 1793, it was correctly asserted in a Petition to the House of Commons by the Society of the Friends of the People that forty

<sup>1</sup> "Lady Mary Wortley Montague and Her Times," p. 189.

<sup>2</sup> "George Selwyn, His Letters and His Life" (edited by E. S. Roscoe and Helen Clergue), p. 254.

peers returned "eighty-one of your honourable members."<sup>1</sup>

But absolute as was the power of the peer over his nominee, it was less in practice than might have been expected; the nobleman was not unpatriotic, and he was shrewd enough not to interfere too often or too arbitrarily with the free action of his member. Sometimes the peer had only a controlling influence in a borough, and he frequently used it in order to bring into public life a man whose reputation became historic. "Madam, I am entirely at a loss how to thank your Grace for the honour and service which your Grace's condescending to interest yourself in my election at Stafford has been to me. Having sent the recommendation which I had the honour to receive from Lady Spenser to his Lordship's agent, I profited by the permission allowed me to make use of your Grace's letter as my first and best introduction to Lord Spenser's interest in the town." The writer of this fulsome epistle was Sheridan, his correspondent was the Duchess of Devonshire.<sup>2</sup> It was by the aid of these aristocratic supporters that the famous orator was able to enter the House of Commons.

The idea of a pocket borough is repulsive to the political purist, but the recognition by the nobleman of the eighteenth century of the use that might

<sup>1</sup> "Parliamentary Debates," vol. xxx. p. 797. And see Taylor, "Origin and Growth of the English Constitution," vol. ii. p. 467.

<sup>2</sup> Sichel's "Sheridan," vol. i. p. 614 (note).

be made of his electoral influence is a tribute to his political sagacity and prudence. It was in fact a recognition of the power of parliamentary government, and it sharply differentiated the English nobleman from the aristocrat of France or, indeed, of any other European nation. It was a relinquishment of his power as a feudal lord, the essential element of which is the exercise of direct personal rule. In place of this was an intention to take part in the government of the country by means which, though contrary to true representative principles, were a distinct recognition of the force of representative government and which, however much they may be condemned theoretically, were certain in time to give place to a more correct and popular system.

The social supremacy of the nobleman often caused him to be dominated by individual political inclinations and impulses, and also to be indifferent to many of the measures which came before the House of Commons. This rather detached attitude gave the nominated member for a pocket borough more independence in regard to his votes than he would otherwise have had ; but, on the other hand, he was never safe from the loss of his seat, if by chance his conduct did not satisfy his aristocratic nominator.

If the aristocracy had been able only to influence measures in the House of Lords by its own votes, and those in the Commons by those of its nominees, it would not have held the extraordinary political

position which it did in this period. The outstanding fact was that noblemen formed by constitutional custom a governing class which was united by family ties and personal intimacies and at the same time was constantly, if slowly, strengthened by recruits from below—from the army and navy, from politicians, and from the greater landed gentry. Behind them lay an impressive history. The Whig peers had been at once the creators and the supporters of the Revolution, and had ever since—sometimes too peremptorily—kept this fact before the English people. On the other hand, the Tory peers had been more or less actively, though often more or less secretly, the most powerful adherents of the Stuarts, the leaders of the country party. So that whenever the ordinary Englishman in the middle of the eighteenth century reviewed the immediate past of his country, without reverting to remoter times, nothing struck him more than the exceeding influence and importance of the peerage.

This record alone was sufficient to give the aristocracy immense power as a governing class. It was, moreover, at this time, and under existing constitutional circumstances, an essential and useful part of the machinery of English government. Without the peers there would not have been enough suitable men to form a Ministry, or to represent Great Britain at foreign courts. Though the members of the Cabinet were fewer than at the present day, they were almost entirely peers. Without con-

sidering either high or subordinate offices in a Ministry, we have only to bear in mind that from the administration of Walpole, in 1721, to that of Pitt, in 1783, eleven Prime Ministers were peers and that neither of these two great commoners could dispense with a cabinet of peers. If Chatham be eliminated from the list, the other names containing, as they do, those of the Dukes of Newcastle, Devonshire, Grafton, and Portland, are sufficient to illustrate the influence of the peerage in public life, for these ducal premiers had certainly not intellectual ability equal to their high rank.

When Lord North at last fell from power, in 1782, the three politicians who had done most in Parliament to overthrow the Prime Minister and to lessen the personal power of the King were Fox, Burke, and Conway. Yet the chief of the new Cabinet was not one of these leaders of the House of Commons, but the Marquis of Rockingham, whose good intentions were obvious, but whose ability was in an inverse ratio to his vast estates in Yorkshire. In other words, his influence, territorial and social, was of more public weight than the political capacity of any one of the eminent men who had fought the Tories so ably and so persistently in Parliament.

In addition, moreover, to the actual governing power which the concentration of the administration into a few hands, and those chiefly of aristocrats, produced, it gave the latter great influence by means of the patronage, both lay and ecclesiastical, which they



WILLIAM HENRY CAVENDISH, THIRD DUKE OF PORTLAND.





could dispense or effect, there was scarcely a vacant bishopric or benefice for which a peer had not a nominee. It is true that this influence, immense though it was, was less than might have been expected, because there was little feeling either of officialism or of caste among the peers. They governed rather as powerful individuals—representatives of the landed interest—than as members of an aristocratic caste. The aristocracy with all its faults had no dislike of the people, and was in no sense, as in France, a class which was a combination of small autocrats and high officials.

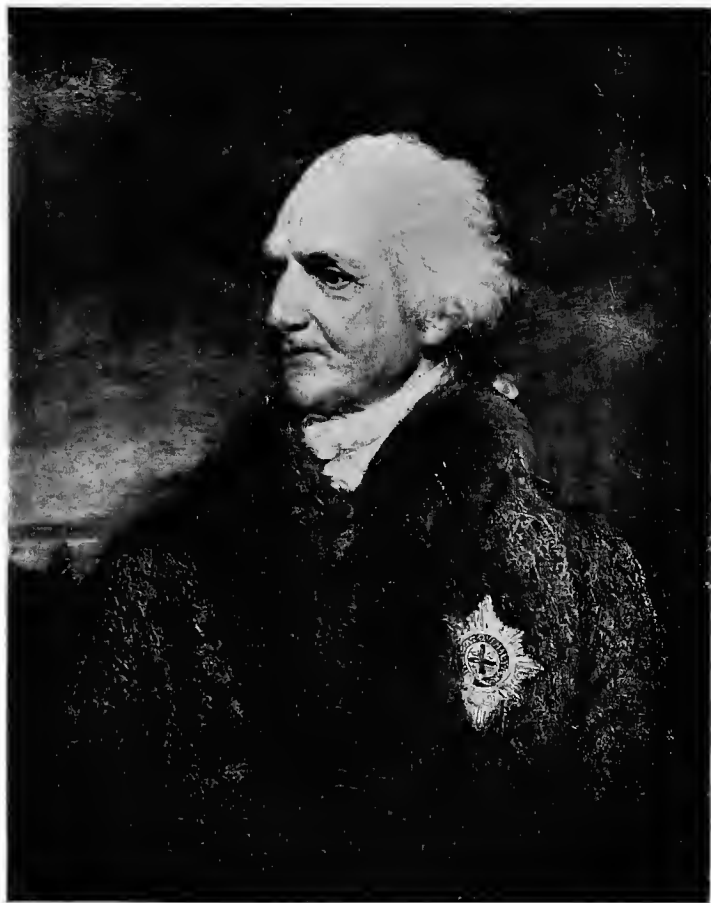
The task of governing the peers often undertook to the detriment of their pleasure, in some measure under pressure of public opinion, and to some extent because they realised that it was an obligatory attribute of their rank. "Grafton," writes a modern historian, "a man of pleasure and culture, was out of his proper element in political life. He grudged leaving his kennels at Wakefield Lodge, or the heath at Newmarket, to transact public business in London, and preferred reading a play of Euripides at Euston to being bored by a debate at Westminster. On no other English member have the responsibilities of office had so little effect; he would put off a Cabinet meeting for a race meeting, and even in the presence of the King and Queen appeared at the Opera by the side of his mistress, Nancy Dawson, afterwards Lady Maynard."<sup>1</sup> This is the same peer of whom

<sup>1</sup> Hunt, "Political History of England, 1760-1801," p. 86.

his biographer writes that he was a nobleman with a high sense of public duty, with a real desire to use his powers and his position for the good of his country,<sup>1</sup> and who, in 1775, not only had the courage to speak against the policy of the American War in the House of Lords, but even expostulated in private with the King, and was consequently deprived of the Privy Seal.

The contradictory elements in Grafton's character, as is shown in these descriptions, and the several contrasts of his life, so far from proving that the third Duke of Grafton was a strange and unusual being, in fact cause him to be typical of his class with its supreme position and its apparently strange anomalies. That position was pre-eminent, partly because few men except peers had the leisure, the wealth, the influence, or the training, to enable them to take part in the administration of the country. Peers were, in truth, educated expressly to fit them to govern. The Grand Tour was part of the education of a nobleman, it was often as usual as residence at Oxford or Cambridge and was sometimes the sequel to a stay at one of these universities. Noblemen formed a distinct and favoured section of the university—exempt during most of the century from the ordinary discipline and from the usual examinations. "In several colleges" (at Oxford), says an anonymous writer in 1790, who took up his pen in defence of the existing state of the university, "the heirs of the first families in

<sup>1</sup> Sir W. Anson, "Memoirs of the Third Duke of Grafton," p. 7.



AUGUSTUS HENRY, THIRD DUKE OF GRAFTON.



the kingdom submit to the same exercises and to the same severity of discipline with the lowest members of the Society.”<sup>1</sup>

One has but to note that the writer of this passage considers the young nobleman's submission to discipline and examinations as a favour conferred by him on the university to perceive, how from his birth, the peer was regarded as a person above and apart from the general body of Englishmen. At the beginning of his career, in the place where rank should be the least valued, he was, in the estimation even of those in authority, on a pinnacle above his fellowmen. That, undisciplined and untaught, he should leave Oxford or Cambridge almost as ignorant as when he entered is not surprising; but if he imbibed but little learning, his stay at these universities imbued him with the feeling that nature had placed him in a favoured and special class. From one point of view, therefore, the Grand Tour was the chief period of his education. His travels were not superficial sight-seeing expeditions,—they were often undertaken with a tutor, sometimes singularly unfitted to improve the moral tone of an impressionable youth. The main purpose of the Grand Tour was indeed to educate the young peer, and also to give him a better knowledge of foreign affairs and courts.

<sup>1</sup> Cited, Wordsworth's "University Society in the Eighteenth Century," p. 100. At Eton, down to 1737, noblemen were placed at the heads of their respective forms in the school lists. Lyte, "History of Eton College," p. 304.

Lord Chesterfield planned a most elaborate Grand Tour for his son—he might have been his legitimate offspring. “Things,” he wrote, in one of his letters concerning this youth, “go to the full as well as I could wish at Leipsig; we are absolutely masters of Latin, Greek, French, and German, the last of which we write currently; we have le Droit public de l’Empire; history and geography were read, so that, in truth, now we only want rubbing and cleaning. We begin for that purpose with Berlin at Christmas next, Vienna at Lady Day, and the Academy at Turin at Midsummer; for a whole year. Then to Paris, et si cela ne nous de trotte pas, il faut que le diable s’en mêle.”<sup>1</sup>

The nobleman early in life thus gained an insight into continental society, and often came into intimate contact with those who were responsible for the conduct of affairs in foreign countries. Once across the Channel, he remained abroad for some time—it might be even for two or three years—and pursued his way leisurely, making long stays at capitals, taking part in the social pastimes of the governing classes, sometimes brought into touch with reigning sovereigns. A first-hand knowledge of European affairs was thus acquired which gave the aristocracy a familiarity with foreign politics enabling them not only to discuss these subjects in Parliament with efficiency and weight, but making them also the diplomatists of the nation.

<sup>1</sup> “Letters,” vol. iii. p. 297.

From the accession of William III. to the death of George II. Great Britain may be regarded as in many respects a Continental power, and noblemen formed the only class in the country which was able to deal with affairs from this point of view. The peer was at home in a foreign milieu. Scarcely any one else knew foreign languages at all. Some of the more accomplished of the aristocracy, as, for instance, Lord Chesterfield, carried on their correspondence in French. The English nobleman in the eighteenth century was in fact noticeably cosmopolitan in his habits and tone of mind, and was a welcome and a frequent guest in Parisian salons.

This early acquaintance with the Continent had the effect not only of removing an insular atmosphere from the minds of the men who had actually been abroad, it affected also their contemporaries and associates, so that the whole aristocracy was to some extent familiar with foreign literature and art, and with the agreeable society of Paris—the intellectual centre of all Europe. The result was a remarkable *entente cordiale* between the governing classes of the two capitals, between the English nobleman and the French aristocrat, and a number of close personal friendships may be noted, a unique condition in international society which is only to be found during the eighteenth century.

The English nobleman's personal knowledge of France and of Italy was certainly one of the causes which tended to make him at this period the chief

collector of works of art. By reason of the hereditary principle and of family pride ancestral portraits had gradually accumulated in many mansions, and to the wish to increase them was now added a desire to enlarge the contents of the nobleman's galleries by other works and pictures, a desire stimulated by his Continental travels. He was thus an art collector not like the Venetians, from a love of beauty, but chiefly because the collecting of pictures had become a vogue among his class, one which could be gratified by himself on his foreign tours. Even the most hardened gambler was often a purchaser of pictures, and felt bound to follow the prevailing fashion.

The first Duke of Northumberland spent his money as lavishly on works of art as on cards. "Lord Northumberland's great gallery," writes Horace Walpole, "is finished and opened; it is a sumptuous chamber, but might have been in better taste," and then Walpole goes on to criticise the pictures, which his friend Sir Horace Mann had purchased for the Duke in Italy. Some sixteen years later he tells Lady Ossory how the same nobleman had lost £2,000 at quinzé to the Duke of Marlborough. The Duke of Queensberry—"old Q."—the most unblushing roué of his time, filled his huge villa at Richmond with the collection which he had purchased at the Cornbury sale. Frederick, fifth Earl of Carlisle, was a considerable collector, and in the correspondence of George Selwyn with him we obtain a glimpse of the every-



day character of this fashion in high life. "I dined yesterday," writes the famous man about town, in March, 1781, "at Lord Ashburnham's. I saw in his room a Teniers of the same size as yours—the same subject; he thinks his own the best. It may be so. Je ne sais pas faire la comparaison, sans être connoisseur. But he assures me he gave but fifty guineas for it at most; voilà ce qui m'enrage."<sup>1</sup> Lord Carlisle was a nobleman who took a share in the public life of the age, and Lord Ashburnham was a peer who from time to time held various Court appointments. Neither affected in the least to pose as a skilled connoisseur, yet throughout his life each spent not a little money in the purchase of works of art. When Mrs. Lybbe Powys visited Knowle, then the seat of the Duke of Dorset, she was astonished at the many works of art which she saw and, after telling how impossible it is to enumerate them, concludes by saying that "the present Duke has just bought many, being just returned from abroad, particularly a Lucretia by Titian, from Rome."<sup>2</sup>

In Continental cities the nobleman was something of a millionaire, and there were scarcely any others able to compete with him, for merchants and manufacturers were for the most part engrossed in making

<sup>1</sup> "Hist. MS. Comm. 18th Rep.," App., part vi. p. 474.

<sup>2</sup> Passages from the "Diaries of Mrs. Lybbe Powys," p. 150. The purchases of Italian pictures for the Earl of Dartmouth by his agent in Rome, Thomas Jenkins, are described in the correspondence preserved at Patshull. "Hist. MS. Comm. 15th Rep.," App., part i., vol. iii., pp. 167-171 (1752-7).

fortunes at home. The peer purchased pictures with little critical capacity but with an open purse, and he was ready also to receive works of art from Continental agents when in England. The hereditary house afforded abundant space in which to place his purchases, and to the ancestral portraits by Vandyke and Kneller he now added the works of Italian and Dutch painters, so that many of the homes of the nobility became cosmopolitan galleries of art. They were appreciated by their possessors chiefly as signs of great wealth and of aristocratic refinement, but they were unknown to the people, and were without any influence on the artistic growth of the nation. A later century and unborn generations were to receive the benefit of the expenditure on works of art of the nobleman of the eighteenth century. Yet this fashion produced a familiarity with pictures and gave many noblemen a considerable knowledge, not so much of art as of a certain class of paintings, producing a superficial but agreeable culture which at this time characterised the entire aristocracy.

The patronage accorded by the great in the eighteenth century to men of letters has long been a recognised feature of English literary history, but it has been regarded rather in relation to the author than to the peer. The fact that the nobleman of the eighteenth century was a patron of letters was attributable more to his social influence and wealth than to love of literature. His conduct in this respect was a remarkable proof of the pre-eminent position

then held by the nobleman in England. When Pope dedicated his "Windsor Forest" to Lord Lansdowne and in the forefront of that poem announced to the world that its greatest ornament was that it bore his lordship's name on its first page, this most self-seeking of poets was thinking of his pocket. A present-day divine who obtains the patronage of a duchess for a bazaar may be sure that it will attract a number of buyers, and in most cases this lady will consider it a social duty to make the affair a success. The aristocratic patron in the eighteenth century when he accepted a dedication from a man of letters occupied a similar position, and became for the time his pecuniary and social protector. He not only often put his hand into his pocket—the Duke of Wharton, to whom Young dedicated his tragedy of "Revenge," is said to have given the poetical divine £2,000—but he brought his social influence to bear, and he was able to pose as a man of culture, while his protégé felt bound, when occasion offered, to sound the praises of his patron.

A few of the aristocracy—often the foremost personages in it—were undoubtedly real lovers of literature, and associated as such with men of letters. In the early part of the century Queen Anne's Prime Minister—the first Earl of Oxford—enjoyed an evening with Gay, Prior, and Arbuthnot, and in the middle of the century Lord Shelburne was intimate with Johnson, Goldsmith, and Reynolds. Bubb Doddington, who was created Lord Melcombe,

and himself wrote verses, entertained, in a friendly and hospitable manner, Young, Thomson, and other writers, at his palatial house in Dorsetshire, not to mention Voltaire when he was staying in England, in 1726. An appreciation of literature and a knowledge of books thus became a characteristic of the aristocracy, even of those in it who were what in modern parlance would be called fast, such as Philip, Duke of Wharton, who dissipated the whole of his patrimony, and, according to Pope, wished to emulate Rochester as a wit, and Cicero as a senator.

If the knowledge possessed by noblemen was not profound, it at least gave them a kind of cultured refinement which sharply distinguished peers from squires. The squirearchy, though from time to time it supplied the aristocracy with new members, was in the main jealous of it, whilst the peerage, which again, generally speaking, meant the cultured class, looked down on men who were as a whole boorish in manner, illiterate, and who devoted most of their days to field sports. Squire Western is unquestionably a type of the country gentleman of the eighteenth century, and his dislike and jealousy of the peerage is a leading feature in his character. Humorous writers found amusing material in this antagonism of classes. When Lord Ringbone, "the reprobate, gouty old peer," would have had the musicians, whom the mayor and aldermen of Bath had sent to perform at the lodgings, kicked downstairs, Mr. Simkin Barnard, the simple-minded young squire, flies

into a rage, in which his dislike of the aristocracy is clearly evinced.

“As absurd as I am,  
I don't care a damn  
For you, nor your valet de sham ;  
For a lord, do you see,  
Is nothing to me,  
Any more than a flea ;  
And I'll do as I please while I stay in the house ;  
For the B-n-r-d family all can afford  
To part with their money as free as a lord.”<sup>1</sup>

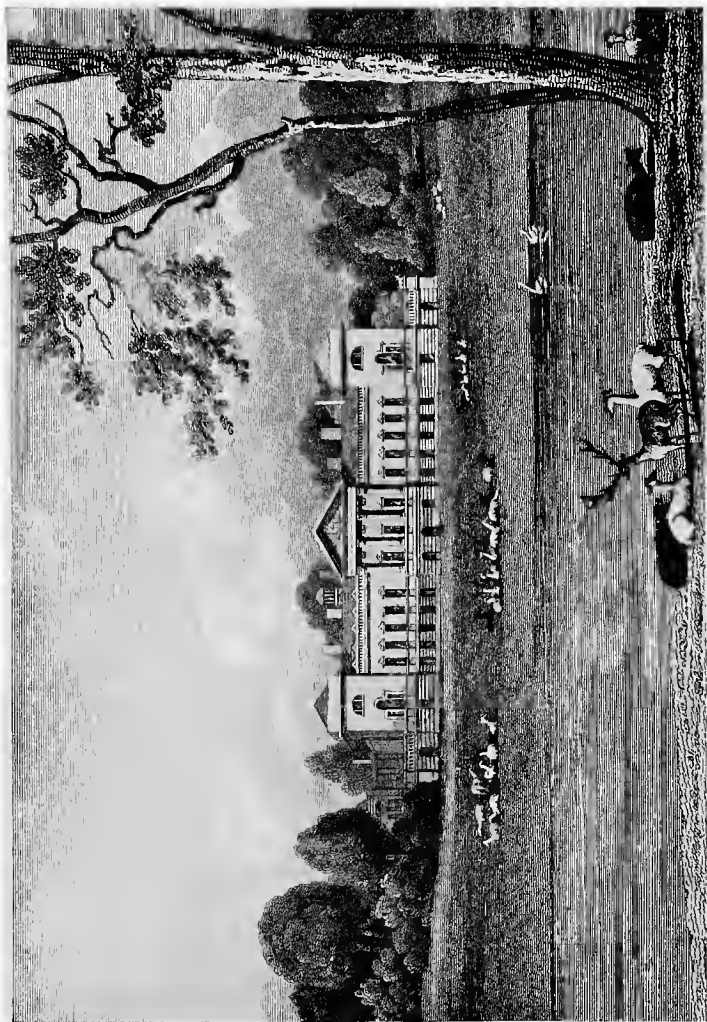
This jealousy was natural, for the squire had a parochial influence only, and was essentially provincial, whilst the peer had more or less of county power, and was at the same time cosmopolitan.

Neither in religion nor morals did a peer differ from a squire or from any other member of the middle class. He was neither better nor worse than his neighbours, though any striking breach of the moral code by one of the aristocracy then, as now, attracted the attention of the public. Of this the notorious profligacy of the Duke of Queensberry, or “Old Q.,” as he was familiarly called, is familiar instance. Happily, unlike the French nobleman, the English peer was not obliged in early youth to marry some child whom he scarcely knew—with the inevitable result that marriage was in France regarded by husband and wife, not as a tie based on affection, but only as a duty to the family and to perpetuate the race.

<sup>1</sup> Anstey, “The New Bath Guide” (edition 1784), p. 40.

The English aristocrat was essentially a grand seigneur who did everything on a large scale. He built magnificent houses, such as Buckingham House in the capital, and in the country as at Castle Howard, Eastbury, Bowood, Wentworth, and Woburn,<sup>1</sup> which with others "solid, masculine, and unaffected," remain as monuments of the age when the aristocracy was pre-eminent, and which have left a marked impression on the domestic architecture of rural England. In Paris and in London the nobleman was equally at home. He played—often in a lavish manner—the patron of letters, he spent hundreds on pictures, and thousands at cards, and he was cabinet minister, diplomatist, and wire-puller. He had, in fact, at this time reached the zenith of his influence and, in a remarkable and unique degree, political, social, and financial power was in this period combined in his person, for the middle class—the Men of the Industrial Revolution—which was presently to lessen every side of his influence, was still only in the making.

<sup>1</sup> Reginald Blomfield, "A Short History of Renaissance Architecture in England," p. 190.



WOBURN ABBEY.





## CHAPTER IX

### THE MIDDLE CLASS

As we turn from the Nobility to the Middle Class in the eighteenth century, it is like passing from an inspection of some complete and highly finished piece of work to a large and inchoate mass in which lie immense possibilities of future development.

The importance of the middle class as a factor in the development of society and of literature in this age can scarcely be overrated. "The most important fact in English history during the eighteenth century is the rise of a new middle class."<sup>1</sup> Analysing the literary qualities of Defoe, Sir Leslie Stephen also has something to say about the development of this new class of readers, "Outside the polished circle of wits we have the middle class, which is beginning to read, and will read what it really likes."<sup>2</sup> But these fragmentary allusions to a remarkable fact, although they suggest reflections, are somewhat tantalising. For this admittedly important element in English society which was then in process of growth

<sup>1</sup> "The Life of Wesley," by C. T. Winchester (New York and London, 1906).

<sup>2</sup> "English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century," p. 137.

is touched on lightly and inferentially, and under the assumption that the reader must know all about it.

When the phrase, the middle class, is used, it is intended to comprise a large and varied class, one which has a perceptible milieu of its own and which is distinct from other portions of the community, less by its manner of life than by its general mental and moral tone and by the definite character of that tone.

If we analyse this statement a little more in detail it is obvious that neither a peasant nor a nobleman belongs to the middle class, but that, between the one and the other are a number of persons in different stations of life, living under different conditions, and in different places, in town and country, some rich and some poor, individually differing in character, in disposition, and in the objects after which they are striving. But in spite of these personal differences this immense stratum stands in our mental vision—blending, it is true, with the class above and below it—not as a particular aggregation of people with similar daily occupations, but as a great mass connected by broad common ideas and tastes, a perfectly definite and comprehensible whole. So general are some of its characteristics—its common sense, its want of imagination, its monotonous life—that the words have often obtained something of contemptuous significance as of grovelling mediocrity, unfair indeed to not a few of those who belong to this part of the population. Qualities not without

merit have become exaggerated into faults and so have created impressions which, from an historical point of view in regard to society in the eighteenth century, are often erroneous.

Socially the middle class is composed of persons nearly all of whom have an occupation for the purpose of earning a livelihood, and whose entire day is in the main, therefore, engrossed by commerce or manufacture, law, medicine, or agriculture.<sup>1</sup> Though the clergy and persons who are teachers at Oxford or Cambridge have some distinct mental characteristics, tending to separate them in some degree from the rest of this class, yet these distinctions are not so numerous or so strong as actually to take those who possess them out of the section of society to which they naturally belong. Though it is useful to identify the middle class with those who are engaged in the above-stated ways, one must not draw too strict a line, for the middle class must be recognised as including every one who may, with reasonable accuracy, in consequence of temperamental likeness, be considered as of it.

Not until the eighteenth century is reached did

<sup>1</sup> "What had since happened (the writer is referring to the period after 1760) had been the growth of a great comfortable middle class, meaning by the middle class the upper stratum, the professional men, the lawyers, clergymen, physicians, the merchants who had been enriched by the growth of commerce and manufactures; the country gentleman whose rents had risen and who could come to London and put off their old rusticity." Stephen, "English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century," p. 192.

this portion of the population, lying between the great landowners and the peasantry in the country, and above the manual workers in towns and villages, exist as a definite body. Hitherto it had neither the numbers nor the homogeneity nor the common feeling which would allow it to be designated as a middle class. In the towns were lawyers and physicians, merchants who were often wealthy, and some manufacturers, such as the Sussex iron masters of the sixteenth century, or the cloth merchants of the western counties. In the country were many small landed gentry and innumerable yeomen. But the only union among the townsmen was municipal as in the town council, or mercantile as in the guild, which, however, was a mediaeval rather than a modern institution. Such influence as a middle-class person possessed was therefore individual rather than corporate.

The Squires, with common occupations and pleasures, had necessarily like tastes and ideas, but they were a species of inferior rural aristocracy, living in greater sympathy, political and social, with the patricians, whom they bowed down to, than with the commercial people, whom they scarcely recognised and generally despised. The yeomen who, up to the beginning of the eighteenth century, formed so important a body, and from whom the soldiers of the Parliamentary armies had been largely recruited, were, owing to the difficulty of communication, far from homogeneous, and were socially even more akin to the labourer than to the squire. They belonged

to a distinct class, but it was rather a class of individuals than such a section of the population as the middle class became after the middle of the eighteenth century. For with the eighteenth century vital changes are noted. Isolated individuals, those who lived in provincial towns and in London, in rural districts and in cities, began to be welded together by more frequent intercourse and by common ideas, feelings, and interests, partly the result of the influence of new forms of literature, and partly of the combination of capitalists and manufacturers in support of their business interests.

The rise of a class of master manufacturers, though it primarily affected the industrial condition of England, had also important social results which were clearly visible by the end of the century.<sup>1</sup> It produced a considerable body of men, sagacious and self-reliant, many of whom, by reason of the application of science to industry, as in the case of Josiah Wedgwood, possessed a first-rate knowledge of art and mechanics. They were an intellectual leaven in their neighbourhood. Mathew Boulton, who was the son of a Birmingham toyshop keeper, liked to assemble about him at his home near Handsworth, not far from his metal works, which were founded in 1759—the products of which were valued all over Europe—a group of friends. They used to go

<sup>1</sup> Les créateurs du système de fabrique ont créé en même temps une classe, une espèce sociale nouvelle." Mantoux, "La Révolution Industrielle au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle," p. 379.

to his house when the moon was at the full, and so became known as the Lunar Society.<sup>1</sup> Here every new invention and its effects on trade and society were keenly discussed.

For business purposes these men—assisted by the marked improvements in highways which are noticeable after 1745—went all over England, and often to the Continent. They had correspondents at home and abroad, and in their age were chiefs of industry, able, methodical, and ambitious. At one and the same time, they were amassing wealth and spreading knowledge. The majority, it is true, had neither the love of art of Wedgwood nor the knowledge of science of Boulton; but they had, as has been well said, the qualities of conquerors—ambition, boldness, untiring energy, and also egotism. If most of them were less personally admirable than a select number who united agreeable qualities with the higher characteristics of the man of action, they were all equally important factors in the creation of the middle class. These manufacturers and their families were in many districts supplanting the disappearing yeomen, from whom not a few were sprung; in other parts they were buying out the squires, everywhere in England forming groups which, unperceived by their contemporaries, were annually adding to the numbers, the wealth, the independence, and the influence of the stratum of society to which they belonged.

<sup>1</sup> Smiles, "Lives of Boulton and Watt," p. 369.

One need scarcely exemplify further the details of the movement. This intellectual vitality, however, bringing with it increased material comfort arising from successful work in business, and a sense of comradeship, was nowhere more remarkable than in Norwich and its neighbourhood, where the families of Taylor and Martineau, in the latter half of the century, formed the centre of a large circle marked by intellectual cultivation and by uncommon ability. Here, too, the Gurneys, a memorable Quaker family, had obtained remarkable success in business, and had increased the prosperity of the city and the importance of the middle class. By the establishment about 1750 of a Book Club in Birmingham, which became a nucleus of the intelligence and culture of the town, and, in 1779, of a public library<sup>1</sup> we see evidence of the same tendencies. In Liverpool, at last, towards the close of the century, each coffee-house had usually a reading-room attached to it; there, too, in 1769, an Academy of Art was founded, and literary societies were established by some of the citizens.

In fact, the material prosperity and the higher standard of mental attainment of the middle class in the provincial towns is not the least important fact in the development of this section of the people during the eighteenth century. If we realise the cumulative effect of the progress of the several centres, we can perceive the class in which we are interested

<sup>1</sup> Langford, "A Century of Birmingham Life," pp. 57, 283.

increasing and spreading, like a rising tide, over the whole of England. Memoirs, letters, and biographies have fixed attention so much on London in the eighteenth century, and especially on a small if influential society in the West End of the town, that we are prone to minimise, or at any rate not to realise, the immense force, moral and political, which was so rapidly growing in the provinces, and especially in the Midlands and in the North of England.

The influence of India on the material and social growth of the middle class is also a remarkable feature, one which has never received due attention. Private fortunes and public reputations were gained in the East by men of modest birth, who returned to England united by common business interests and by official ties, adding at once to the wealth and to the reputation of the class to which they belonged. Warren Hastings and Lord Clive, though one became an official and the other a soldier, were, after receiving the education of middle-class boys, sent out to make their fortunes as writers in the East India Company's service. Governor Pitt, who began his career at the end of the seventeenth century, and who sent home the famous diamond which is now exhibited to gaping crowds in the Louvre, is another example of a remarkable element of the age. The list could be indefinitely amplified by the names of many men who have gained no historical fame because they were men of business only and not politicians, though the aggregate of



their influence on their age has been marked and important.

Many of the country gentlemen were still rude and rough, and were well typified by Squire Western and Tony Lumpkin; but they were growing fewer in proportion to the professional and business men, and their importance as a social element in the age has been somewhat exaggerated. Thus, throughout England we see emerging a homogeneous, a powerful and a solid, entity, unconscious still of its own strength, but revealing new instincts, political and social—significant of a momentous, though a peaceful, revolution. It is a definite class, actuated by common ideas and sympathies, and as obviously distinct as the aristocracy and the peasantry.

But of necessity the line was not sharply defined; there was a fringe of persons with characteristics which make them indeterminate as a class. Such an one was Horace Walpole, who in his last years became Earl of Orford. He belonged to the aristocracy by birth, by breeding, and by temperament, yet his literary inclinations caused him to come into life-long and intimate contact with the middle class, though he never belonged to it. Gray and Mason, Mann and other friends and correspondents, were of it; his books caused him to think of it, to wish to affect it. He is in fact on the border line, tastes and temperament essentially aristocratic are always at war with his inclination to be an author who will be read by the middle class. On the other

hand, his friend George Selwyn was by birth of the middle class; he was a small country gentleman as far as property went; he was also an official, with a sinecure office, yet he was always tending towards the aristocracy. The fifth Earl of Carlisle and his family were his dearest friends; he was constantly in the houses and in the company of peers and peeresses, and his letters are filled with gossip about their daily doings. One cannot therefore call Selwyn a middle-class man either in surroundings or tastes, and he must be included in the number of those who belong to the fringe.

Those who can be included in the class now under analysis at length recognised the fact that they belonged—irrespective of their actual occupations—to a distinct stratum of the English people, one which was yearly growing in importance. They perceived the aristocracy above them, the toilers in the fields and the operatives of the factory below them. They had now a pride of class and an appreciation of their own value in the commonwealth; they held that they were superior to mechanics and peasants; and though different from, yet not less important in modern England than, hereditary peers.

The rise of this large and increasing mass is signalled by the existence of writers who were actuated by, and reflected, its ideas. Their works were intended to be read by it. Defoe, by breeding and by the course of his life, was essentially a middle-class man. His political, his social, and his economical writings,

permanent or ephemeral, were intended to mould the opinions of the average middle-class citizen. They were addressed to men of business by a business man; they put forward common-sense arguments to impress common-sense persons. Their very existence was a recognition of a middle class with common mental characteristics then rapidly growing in size and power, which had now, even at the beginning of the century, for the first time to be considered as a great national factor. These people Defoe helped to influence, and he troubled little either about the peasantry, or about the aristocracy, of England.

Presently Steel founded *The Tatler*, and Addison *The Spectator*, which, with their successor, *The Guardian*, and other journals, would scarcely have existed had there not been a middle class which read in them about the foibles and the weaknesses of those who belonged to their own section of society. Of this was Sir Roger de Coverley, the country gentleman; the Templar from an Inn of Court; Sir Andrew Freeport the merchant; Captain Sentry, who, having a small patrimony, had retired from the Army; Will Honeycomb, the man about town; and lastly, the clergyman without a preferment, these together formed the club of which *The Spectator* was the leader. Each is representative of a different section of one great class, which was united by a similarity of ideas and tastes. The doings of the members of the club were uninteresting to those above and below

them, their personalities were as much above the peasants as they seemed to the aristocracy to be below it, and neither the one class nor the other sympathised with the point of view of those whose conversations, discussions, and anecdotes were related by *The Spectator*. It was the mental atmosphere, rather than the daily occupation or the profession, which united these imaginary beings, vivid types, if not actual portraits, of living people.

The union of ideas and the extension of the middle class were vitally affected by family unions between mercantile men and non-aristocratic country land-owners, and by the purchase of landed property by rich manufacturers who became from that moment lovers of the country, both of which were special features of the eighteenth century. Thus year by year the antagonism between the squires and the moneyed men was being broken down, tending to lessen the jealous fears of encroaching power, social and political on the one side, and the dislike of an exclusiveness and pride arising from the ownership of paternal acres on the other.<sup>1</sup> Politically the merchant and the squire could not usually hope

<sup>1</sup> When Mrs. Lybbe Powys, then Miss Girle, the daughter of a London physician, went with her father's friend, Mr. Jackson—who had a house in London and a fine estate Wesenham Hall, in Norfolk—to the country in 1756, she says that, according to custom, "the vicar and his wife and near tenants were at the Hall ready to receive us" ("Diary," p. 3). This fact shows how gradually the pride of acres and the corresponding submissiveness of those who possessed them not was dying out in the eighteenth century.

to agree; but the union of families was, towards the end of the century, tending to a union of ideas which was cemented by the increase of forms of literature which were acceptable to a middle class, whether recruited from the city or the manor. Examples of this union may be found over and over again, sometimes among names not unfamiliar in eighteenth-century literature. Sir Horace Mann, Walpole's correspondent for half a lifetime at Florence, and who was constantly in contact with foreign grandees, and English peers on their travels, was the son of a London merchant who bought a property in Kent, while his mother was the daughter and heiress of a man of old family in Gloucestershire. Samuel Crisp, the memorable friend and adviser of Fanny Burney, a first-rate type of a new section of the middle class in the eighteenth century—the cultivated men of leisure—was the son of a merchant whose wife likewise belonged to an old Gloucestershire county family.<sup>1</sup>

Samuel, or "Daddy" Crisp, as he was called by all the Burney family, was twenty years older than Dr. Burney. In his younger days, when musical companion to Fulk Greville, the Doctor had made Crisp's acquaintance at his patron's place, Welbury House in Wiltshire. He then lost sight of him, for Crisp seems to have gone abroad to Italy, but he reappeared among the Burneys after their return to London. Though he was a friend of that great

<sup>1</sup> W. H. Hutton, "Burford Papers," p. 15.

lady, Margaret Cavendish Harley, Duchess of Portland, Samuel Crisp is as interesting as an eighteenth-century middle-class dilettante as Horace Walpole is as an aristocratic dilettante in the same era. He was, in fact, a new species, one of the first of the leisured middle-class amateurs who are to-day so numerous. Mr. Thrale, the wealthy brewer and man of business, with his admirable library and his collection of portraits by Reynolds, was a somewhat similar character, though with obvious differences, who, like Crisp, was a new type which was, in the succeeding century, to increase and multiply.

Crisp came of well-to-do parents, his mother being a descendant, as I have said, of a Gloucestershire family. In early life he was a fashionable young man, and had a "small though unencumbered fortune," but he seems to have spent rather too much money on pictures, sculpture, and bric-a-brac, with which his villa at Hampton, where he went to live about 1755, was filled. Presently he returned to an out-of-the-way place, Chessington Hall, in Surrey, which stood on high ground, and was approached by nothing more than a track from Epsom across the fields. It belonged to an old friend, a certain one Christopher Hamilton, with whom he had what Madame d'Arblay calls "some picnic plan," in modern phraseology he was a paying guest.

Here for nearly thirty years he lived quietly, taking care of his health, which was always delicate: "my gout is so far removed that I stamp about as

much as I can, but am too stiff in my joints to use as much walking as I did before," and in vain dosing himself, as the fashion was, with many sorts of quack medicines. "I am just going to try a steel," he tells his sister, "a medicine of which Dr. Lewis gives a most wonderfully favourable recommendation in his book, viz., filings of iron steeped in Rhenish or old Hock; now I think as I have old Hock by me, I cannot put it to a better use." When one reads this, one is not surprised that people in the eighteenth century did not live out their full threescore years and ten.

Health and economy were sufficient reasons for his retirement—which was henceforth only broken by a visit to London in the spring—to a country-house with the host whom he liked, whence he could watch the world and its work, and where he could have his friends as guests if he wished. Visitors he often had; his sister, Mrs. Gast from Burford, sometimes even the Thrale contingent: "The whole family of the Thrales last Wednesday, viz. Mr. Thrale, Mrs. Thrale, Miss, *alias* Queeny, and the great Dr. Johnson, came over in form to make me a visit—their civilities and invitations were beyond expression."

The Burney family came constantly, and, when Fanny Burney was not staying at Chessington, she was corresponding with Crisp. As he was one of the few who were allowed to read her diary, he knew every detail of her daily life. It is a charm-

ing picture, this of the quick and sympathetic girl and the sensible and amused elderly man, who united common sense to a cultivated mind and an affectionate disposition to a sound judgment. He was the very one to take a permanent place in Fanny Burney's heart, for he was quite unassuming, and he gave her the best advice, not with an air of superior wisdom, but simply as an older companion. Dr. Burney was so busy with his music lessons, his literary work, and his parties, that he had little time to give to his children. Samuel Crisp was exactly the reverse, for his life was one long space of leisure. Once he wrote a tragedy, "Virginia," which had but little merit, and only a short run at Drury Lane, in 1754, though Garrick himself played *Virginius*. Its slight success was a keen disappointment to its author, who had probably set his heart on making up for a somewhat aimless life by a notable achievement as a dramatist. But he was too sensible a man to take his failure to heart to the extent which has often been asserted, though doubtless it accentuated for the moment his want of interest in a merely social life. A sound scholar, an appreciative critic and lover of music and the fine arts, he is memorable as an interesting example of a new group of men among the middle class.

In the preceding century the son of the country landowner who went into commerce, though he was glad to make money, did not, in consequence of his mode of life, regard himself as one of the body



of merchants. He was pleased to dig in the same pit, but he was out of sympathy with his fellow-labourers. The son born of a county family who went to Aleppo to amass money and lived with men from various parts of Great Britain bent on the same purpose, was one of a body of adventurers, not a member of a class. But as the eighteenth century lengthens, the tendency is towards a lessening of this exclusive attitude of mind, and the son of a squire became not only a man of business, but essentially one of the middle class.

## CHAPTER X

### THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

As soon as the novel takes a recognised place in English literature, the importance, even the existence, of the middle class becomes more evident. For the new fiction was intended for middle-class readers, it turned chiefly on the actions of middle-class people, and was written by persons of that class, who expressed its feelings. Most of the famous literary names of the eighteenth century belong to it. Richardson, Smollett, Fielding, and Fanny Burney are typical representatives of it; they understood it; and one reason why their books were so successful was because their middle-class readers saw how realistic and how true were the delineations, not only of manners and modes of life, but of feeling and thought. When we turn to more serious subjects we see the same fact equally evident. Johnson, Hume, and Gibbon demonstrate the literary vitality of the class for whom they wrote, and to which they belong.

Among politicians Burke is the best example; because he was never accepted as a social equal by those important Whig noblemen with whom he worked in Parliament, and his life in London and at Beacons-

field resembled that of the middle-class gentleman of means both in town and country. With Lord Rockingham and with his neighbour at Bulstrode, the Duke of Portland, Burke associated as a politician only; with Johnson the writer, Mr. Thrale the wealthy brewer, and Charles Burney the music teacher, he forgathered in intimate social intercourse as a friend. Burke, in fact, typifies the political position of the middle class, its growing importance—on which the seal was eventually set by the Reform Act of 1832—still but half-recognised, and that unwillingly, by the Crown and by the aristocracy.

Common sense and moderation were the characteristics of the eighteenth century, as they are usually of men who are prosperous and contented, and such people formed the strength of, and gave character to, the middle class, then rapidly increasing in numbers. In architecture, in painting, and in literature, we find these qualities to be predominant throughout the age. Of architecture Bath is the most striking instance. The houses which were built by Wood and his successors transformed the city, they were planned for people who were in easy circumstances, neither for poor men nor for millionaires. In groups, or isolated, we can still find in almost every town from one end of England to the other substantial, unassuming, but yet dignified houses which recall to the onlooker the Georgian age, and more especially the rise and growing importance of that new class for whom new dwellings had to be found.

Reynolds and Gainsborough have left many portraits of the aristocracy ; they have left as many of those who, before this period, would not have been portrayed. Likenesses of Johnson and Garrick, Mrs. Sheridan, Mrs. Crewe, and many more too numerous to be mentioned, remind us that another class was in process of growth with its own desires, and a larger cultivation. Without an increasing appreciation of landscape by well-to-do professional and business men it would have been impossible for the painters of landscapes, Gainsborough, Richard Wilson, and Paul Sandby, to have found a remunerative market. The increase of landscape art was in a measure caused by the growing appreciation of natural scenery, even of wild country such as was to be found among the English lakes and in Welsh valleys, places which, almost unknown to most of the art patrons of the day, were already becoming the haunts of artists. Sometimes the artist sought to depict still more distant and more strange lands, as when Cozens drew the imposing mountains of Elba, which one can see at South Kensington.

This particular appreciation not only made for truth in art, it prevented any growth of a school of painters such as that of Watteau and Lancret in France. It also tended to a change of taste in literature as well as a change of social habits, and of dress among the middle classes. It implied not only a love of out-of-door life, but of physical exercise and even of physical exertion for the mere pleasure either of the

exercise, or of the scenes to attain which that exertion was necessary. Few men valued the comforts of life more than Dr. Johnson; one reason why he liked the 'Thrales' house at Streatham so well was because he found there excellent food and comfortable accommodation yet, with extraordinary courage, he made a tour in the Highlands, passed over a rough and a dangerous sea to Skye, and underwent many hardships with good temper and patience, partly for the purpose of viewing the scenery. Two years later, in 1774, when he was sixty-five, he wandered through Derbyshire and North Wales, where the scenery was the first object of the tour. When he saw Hawkestone, a pleasant bit of rather rugged Midland landscape, it was to him "a region abounding with striking scenes and terrific grandeur," so vivid was the impression which the line of hills made on him.

Gray, as is shown by his "Journal in the Lakes" (1769), was a close observer of the scenery of the North, and he enjoyed the wilder aspects of the Westmorland dales and streams, as much as he did musings among the colleges of Cambridge, and quiet hours beneath the Buckinghamshire beeches. No one has described the features of the Lake country with more sympathy and appreciation, as of the famous falls of Lodore: "The stream was nobly broken, leaping from rock to rock, and foaming with fury. On one side a towering crag, that spired up to equal, if not overtop, the neighbouring cliffs (this lay all in shade and darkness), on the other hand, a rounder, broader

projecting hill shagged with wood and illumined by the sun, which glanced sideways on the upper part of the cataract.”<sup>1</sup>

A quite different person, Thomas Twining, a Cambridge graduate, and a cultivated country parson, and who came of a commercial family still prosperous and respected, delighted in tours through England solely for the sake of the scenery. He enjoyed (1776) the “fine open boldness” of Yorkshire; he described a village as “scattered here and there upon broken romantic ground, houses, cottages, craggy hills, climbing pathways, road, water, wood, well mixed and beautiful.”<sup>2</sup> This is quite a new intellectual feature, and this remarkable change in the middle class is well exemplified by the difference between the treatment of nature by Thomson in 1728 and in the immediately following years during which “The Seasons” were published, and by Cowper, in 1785. “The Seasons” have been rightly considered by critics as marking the beginning of a new era in English poetry. Natural objects are given a first place; they are regarded as admirable and interesting; they are to be noted and thought of by an intelligent writer, and they are often accurately and realistically described. They are, however, still looked at from the outside, from the

<sup>1</sup> Gray’s “Works” (edited by Gosse), vol. i. p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Twining, “Recreations and Studies of a Country Clergyman of the Eighteenth Century, being Selections from the Correspondence of T. Twining,” p. 40.

point of view of a spectator whose feelings are not in the least touched by what he sees. It was the fashion of the time to construct small, artificial gardens and sham waterfalls, which were not a little admired by people who pretended to taste. It was in the same spirit that Thomson described the meadows and the hedgerows in spring.

By the end of the century the poetical treatment of nature had become subjective, rural sights and rural sounds could touch the feelings of a large number of persons, so that when Cowper wrote "The Task" he reflected the mental impressions which many now obtained from the various incidents of a simple out-of-door life :

"Mighty winds  
That sweep the skirt of some far-reaching wood  
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike  
The dash of ocean on his winding shore,  
And lull the spirit while they fill the mind."

These lines would have been incomprehensible to the wits, essentially townsmen, who were the literary arbiters at the beginning of the century ; to them the varied sounds of wind among the trees, recalling a hundred memories of summer and winter, of sunshine and storm, of personal pleasure or sorrow, were unreal. But when this poem was published, an accurate description of a natural fact with its resultant effect on the emotions and the mind, was read by the educated middle class, and became popular because it was a reflection of their own feelings and thoughts,

especially of the feelings of the educated among them, an increasing number of whom lived in the country and in provincial towns. All these facts indicate the beginning of new aspirations and ideals which were leading to larger views of life among the increasing multitude who formed the great mean between rank and poverty, to an interest in art and nature, and to a growth of physical exercise which has not yet ceased.

No doubt a general appreciation of the open air, and of life in it in a quiet fashion was more popular than it is to-day. Every garden had its summer-house which was regularly used, and in every town, more especially in London, public gardens were popular resorts. But sport was confined to the squires and landowners; horse-racing was chiefly the amusement of the rich and of their dependents; out-of-door games, except bowls, were almost unknown. Few rowed for pleasure on a river, and angling was confined to some devotees who lived near the banks of some stream or pond. The treatises of Isaac Walton and of Richard Francks in the seventeenth century are evidences of a genuine and considerable interest in angling when they were written, but though several editions of Walton's delightful book were printed in the eighteenth century, there is no indication of an increasing pleasure in this agreeable pastime, at any rate among the class with which we are now concerned.

The absence of active amusements, the demand



for anything which would break the monotony of life, rather than a cruel spirit, took men to the frequent executions of criminals as to a mere pastime. As a whole, the middle class was worse off for amusement than either the manual labourer or the peer; the former had his dog-fights and bull-baiting, his single-stick combats, and other bloody but easily obtained pleasures; the nobleman could shoot game and hunt foxes and hares and watch cock-fights, so could the squire, but the professional and business man had nothing but the tavern, perhaps with a bowling-green behind it, the coffee-house and the tea garden, and sometimes he went to a play. The increasing opportunities for travel at home were seized by the very section which most had need of it, as a substitute for the sport and the grand tours which to them were largely impossible.

The absence of any kind of vigorous out-of-door life among girls and young women of the middle class was probably a cause of the prevalent feminine timidity, culminating often in an extreme self-consciousness—a form of bodily fear especially in contrast with the rudeness of speech which is so striking at this time. This characteristic is often regarded as having been a mere affectation, for no one to-day can imagine a Sophey Streatfield who could weep at will, and was most attractive to her friends when a tear trickled down her pretty cheek. She was, however, but an example of a physical nervousness and susceptibility which were constantly in evidence by faintings

and by blushings and similar external features, and which had actually begun to be regarded as "good form." A characteristic of one class in this age was exaggerated almost into a habit, but it arose because young women of the middle class were timid and physically weak, since they stayed so much at home.

Mrs. Lybbe Powys—the daughter of Dr. Girle, a London physician living in Lincoln's Inn Fields—tells in her early diary, in 1757, with no little naïveté, how, when she formed one of a party of girls who were walking up Matlock High Torr, they hesitated, and finally turned back, merely from a dread of these harmless slopes. "We tried," she writes, "one evening to ascend the prodigious rock I before spoke of, called Matlock High Torr. Many do, it seems, perform it, but I own I was frightened before I got a quarter of the way up, and each object below began to appear so diminutive, that I even, with some others, consented to be ridiculed for my fears, and with vast joy got down again as soon as possible, and even thought I felt giddy for hours after, and thought myself most happy when I got into the grove, one of the sweetest walks in Matlock."<sup>1</sup> This is a simple story, but it demonstrates how the unfamiliarity of the middle-class girl with natural objects and physical exertion affected her nerves and mind.

But this timidity, not only out-of-doors but even at home, had a yet more radical cause—the middle-class view of the place of women in the eighteenth

<sup>1</sup> "Passages from the Diaries of Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys," p. 30.

century. They were still looked upon as primarily existing to produce children and to take care of the home, and as in every way subordinate to men; in fact, they were regarded from a mediaeval point of view when around them mediaeval ideas had been dispersed. Every infraction of this theory, every effort towards the assertion of individuality or intellectual ideals, laid the middle-class woman open to masculine censure and to the adverse criticism of a majority of her own sex, so that, outside the kitchen and the nursery, she was constantly in a state of timidity productive of a feeling of nervous humility.

No doubt Fanny Burney had a timid and susceptible temperament which caused her to shrink from any allusions in her presence to her books. But allowing for this natural quality, she always shows a feeling that to have taken up work which gave her publicity and took her out of her home was almost unmaidenly. She was often afraid and ashamed of herself. She feels a satisfaction at the accomplishment of a public achievement, yet she is never sure that it is not a result which is contrary to the accepted standard of conduct for young ladies of her class. She shows herself to be often a bundle of contradictions, the tendencies of the present and of a future age conflicting in her.

But the daughter of the peasant felt none of these fears and tremblings, nor did the nobleman's daughter, whose life was freer, and who was accustomed not only to more physical exertions but who moved

about the country-side, and took long journeys from the ancestral home to the London mansion. Lady Sarah Bunbury, with her political friends and her entertainments in London, her horses, her dogs, and her flower-garden in the country, exemplifies one extreme, as Sophey Streatfield and Anna Seward do another. When the peer's daughter was not a Diana, she was often a Lady Bountiful, and her very rank gave her a confident mien.

This very effeminacy, this absence of interests and occupations outside the home, caused the clever young women of the middle class to be the most eager for the intellectual improvement of their sex, the most desirous of breaking out of the monotony of their lives, of escape from needlework and cards. So that from them were recruited alike story-writers and story-readers, most of the former of whom are forgotten except such eminent leaders as Fanny Burney and Jane Austen.

To be able to buy pictures and see places one must have money and leisure, and until the middle of the eighteenth century neither the one nor the other had been sufficiently common among men of business and those who were engaged in professional pursuits, to enable either pictures to be purchased or places to be visited. In the mansions of the aristocracy were many Italian masterpieces which, as I have told on a previous page, had been collected on the Grand Tour,<sup>1</sup> or which their successive owners

<sup>1</sup> See ante, p. 140.

had obtained when they were engaged on official or diplomatic missions abroad.

But the lawyer and the man of business travelled little on the Continent, and had not dwellings in which large canvasses could be exhibited. But as they became more cultivated, moved about more, and had money to spend, they began to be purchasers of small portraits and of homely landscapes by English artists, and their patronage afforded a pecuniary basis for the growth of an English school of painters, essentially simple, sincere, and unaffected in its manner of work, appealing to the instincts of the middle class. The pastoral landscapes of Gainsborough and the charming and quiet water-colours of Sandby depicted rural scenes which suggested, by the frequent introduction of buildings or of agricultural operations, material comfort. Portraits ceased to be official or merely complimentary pictures. Reynolds and Gainsborough by their portraits of women and children illustrate the tendency to an increasing dignity and appreciation of home-life, to the growth of woman's influence in the place where it is most powerful. These pictures and drawings were obtainable by business men at moderate prices. Gainsborough's prices when he went to Bath, in 1760, were at first five to eight guineas for a portrait. As he became sought after he raised them sometimes to forty guineas for a half-length, and to a hundred guineas for a full-length portrait.<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Thrale paid

<sup>1</sup> "Armstrong, *Life of Gainsborough*," p. 87.

Reynolds £35 for a half-length portrait of Dr. Burney, and Wright of Derby lived on the modest amounts, which he received for a long series of portraits, every one of which was of a person of the middle class.<sup>1</sup> In brief, the growth of the middle class made art popular, and united it to the home.

Affluent members of the middle class were even becoming collectors, sometimes with care and judgment, as when Mr. Thrale covered the walls of his villa at Streatham with portraits by Reynolds, sometimes with indiscriminate eagerness, such as the younger Beckford showed when he filled Fonthill Abbey with a collection of works of art and articles of vertu, good, bad, and indifferent. You might in the beginning of the eighteenth century have found many splendid aristocratic mansions in which were works of art of priceless value brought from abroad, but you would seldom have found them in the merchant's parlour. By the end of the century circumstances had changed, and middle-class homes were beginning to absorb the works of English artists and were assisting in the creation of a school of painters, the rise of which was contemporaneous with, and influenced by, the expansion of the middle class.

The large common sense and the moderation which were such excellent qualities in the ordinary affairs of life, degenerated, in the beginning of the century, in religious matters, into indifference. But by the middle

<sup>1</sup> "Life and Works of Joseph Wright, A.R.A.," by William Bemrose, p. 118.

of this period the increasing change of ideas began to have its effect on the religious condition of the middle class. In the alliterative phrase of a divine of to-day, men desired deeds, not dogma. Religion could not remain outside the influence of the new thoughts which were affecting literature and art, agriculture and commerce, and which found their most receptive soil among the middle classes. The practical citizen of London or Manchester cared nothing for theological controversy. He could not follow Warburton's involved and pedantic attacks on Deists and Freethinkers. This bishop might write pages on "The Divine Legation of Moses Demonstrated"; he did not help the manufacturer or the lawyer to live better or to die happier. The majority of citizens had no objection to an Established Church, they accepted it as part of the British Constitution, and they did not want pamphlets to prove either its necessity or its origin. Polemical warfare might interest the minds of theologians and students, it was useless as a guide to daily life. But when Law in his "Serious Call" affirmed that it was the one and only business of a Christian gentleman to distinguish himself by good works, and much else of the like kind, the plain man approved the clear common sense of this teaching. The peasant could not read the writings of Law, and most noblemen would not, and so the religious revival grew among the men and women who above all others appraised deeds and words at their relative value. This movement had

its exaggerations and its extremists, but in the main it coincided with a national need—the desire on the part of the new middle class, who were essentially sincere, to know how “to act the wise and reasonable part of a true Christian.”

The collective personal force of the middle class caused the religious revival and the industrial revolution to become real national movements;<sup>1</sup> the peers could sympathise with the bishops who preached against enthusiasm—which they called fanaticism; but alike in business and in religion the class below them appreciated energy which was directed to objects that it could understand. The hostility of the Church of England to the evangelism of Wesley and his followers would have been less negligible if it had not been contemporaneous with the immense increase in social and national weight of the middle class, which inevitably added not a little to the growth and to the strength of Nonconformity.

Wesley, it should always be remembered, con-

<sup>1</sup> A remarkable illustration of the above statement is found in Birmingham. In 1772 the people of Birmingham decided, in consequence of the great want of places of divine worship in the town, to build two new churches, and houses for the clergy, and also to endow them. This project was carried through by Act of Parliament, and the two churches were completed by 1779. But throughout the proceedings the laymen of the town were the active persons. The foundation-stones were laid by one of the trustees, and the trustees appointed the clergymen. Neither bishops nor clergy appear from beginning to end except for the purpose of the consecration of the buildings. Langford, “A Century of Birmingham Life,” vol. i. p. 205.





JOHN WESLEY.



servative in views and principles, whether political or religious, so far from being a mere emotional and uneducated hedgerow preacher was born of a sound middle-class family, educated at the University of Oxford, and ordained a clergyman of the Established Church. His unshakeable belief in the words of the Bible, his straightforward religious principles and his practical capacity, indicated him as a typical middle-class man imbued with a fervent but well-regulated religious ardour, which acted as an overpowering stimulus to the exercise of his marvellous capacity as a man of action and as a man of business. Wesley found innumerable followers among working men, among Lancashire colliers and Bristol dock hands, but he also gained hundreds of steadfast supporters among well-to-do people who wanted a sound working religion. The middle class under his influence received the impress of what is now popularly called Protestantism, which presently produced great numbers of Non-conformists. This impress, stamped on the middle class in the eighteenth century, it has never lost, and the Anglicanism which marked the more vigorous life of the Established Church in the nineteenth century has had no attractions for the majority of this class.

In the eighteenth century the middle class represented the genius of the English people, now, for the first time, definitely embodied in, and exemplified by, one great aggregation of individuals. Hitherto predominant qualities had shown themselves uncer-

tainly, and without continuity, in persons sufficiently united at times of national crisis to give a national stamp to certain features. Now sobriety, energy, good sense, and love of individual freedom became the unmistakable characteristics of one, and at this time at any rate, the most increasing part of the nation. It was growing so large and so influential that its characteristics became those, in this age, of the people as a whole, for it already far outnumbered the aristocracy, and at the same time the artisans were not yet sufficiently numerous or organised to obscure, or to overwhelm, the class immediately above them.

In fact, the general appearance of the middle class towards the end of the century is that of a great mass of prosperous, contented, and sensible persons, often blessed with competences—sometimes even rich—moral, and respectable, not altogether without formality, but who were yet without the ceremonious manners of the aristocracy which prevailed at the beginning of the century. Politically generally conservative, they had liberal instincts, the result of centuries of constitutional struggles, which produced from among them political reformers. In the towns they began to realise the civic responsibility of daily existence, and to develop that capacity for honest and efficient municipal government which has been the most marked and satisfactory feature of the corporate life of the cities and boroughs of modern England. In religion unemotional and rather formal, but ready

to respond to teachers such as Wesley, who could indicate a practical road to salvation, they were pursuing in many places new social and educational aims. The same forces were producing men and women of letters who looked to their own class for patronage, by means of the sale of their works to it. We see, in fact, a peaceful evolution of a great class which was attaining to maturity without revolution, and on the whole with so little political or intellectual stir that the importance of the movement was difficult of realisation.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE MEN OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

THE industrial revolution, the most momentous movement in the spectacle before us, was effected by men of strikingly different but of powerful personalities, and with aims and ambitions hitherto scarcely known in England. Complex in character, its force was immense, and its results changed the face of the country and the relations of the several sections of English society.

The accession of George I. was a striking sign of the completion of the fundamental political changes of the previous century. "1688," it has been said, "is the end of a long crisis, during which the English people had been struggling for sixty years; a fortunate crisis, since its end gave to England what none of the European nations then possessed—a free government." As a matter of fact, however, the epoch of struggle did not end till 1714, for, during the reign of Queen Anne, there was always a possibility of the return of troubled times, of the anti-Stuart struggle and, until a Hanoverian sovereign was securely seated on the throne, the English people did not feel certain that the change accom-

plished in 1688 was permanent. But the accession of George I. was a national settlement, and from that moment the commencement of the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century may be dated.

The indication of the permanence of the changes which culminated in 1688, presented by the coronation of a German prince, had the effect of opening the gates which had restrained the national energy from the new industrial course. In previous epochs, the people had been engrossed in maritime and commercial expansion, as in the times of Elizabeth; in those of her successors, they were absorbed in a vital national struggle for domestic freedom. The moment, however, that it was realised that this indispensable object was securely achieved, the national forces turned into new channels; the result was the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. The time being opportune, several causes, each reacting on the other, came into play, the aggregate of which, producing new industries and new classes of men, ultimately changed the balance of political power in England.

Of these causes the principal were the invention and the improvement of machinery and its application to manufactures; and this resulted not so much from theoretical genius, as from the practical mechanical cleverness of ingenious discoverers, and from the foresight and energy of capitalists, whose powers of business and capacity of administration

enabled them to utilise commercially the new inventions. They were "the pioneers of the application of mechanics to industry."<sup>1</sup> These two classes contain the Men of the New Industrial Revolution who, by the active combination of opposite and even antagonistic qualities, revolutionised alike the industries and the society of England.

A primary result of this change in mechanical methods was the transformation of the domestic worker into the factory hand. Defoe, in his description of Bradford (on Avon) and Trubridge (Trowbridge), gives a striking picture of the domestic manufactures of the West in the early part of the eighteenth century: "These towns are interspersed with a very great number of villages, I had almost said innumerable villages, hamlets, and scattered houses, in which, generally speaking, the spinning work of all this Manufacture is performed by the poor people; the master clothiers, who generally live in the greater towns, sending out the wool weekly to their houses, by their servants and horses, and at the same time bringing back the yarn that they have spun and finished, which is then fitted for the loom."<sup>2</sup>

The same traits were visible in the North. The Lancashire weaver worked in the country in a cottage surrounded by a bit of land; his wife and

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, "Growth of English Industry and Commerce," p. 609.

<sup>2</sup> Defoe, "Tour Through Great Britain," vol. ii. p. 41 (ed. 1725).



children carded or spun. Domestic manufacturing and small farming were often combined—a charming old-world union, an idyllic scene; but one which beneath its homeliness and its tranquillity hid innumerable evils—abominable hygienic conditions, long hours of work, and unlimited child labour.

Of the domestic system, the wool trade, “the great staple trade of the kingdom” in bygone days, affords a noticeable example. It gave employment to large numbers of persons, not in a single district, as does the cotton trade to-day, but in widely different parts of England—in the eastern counties, in Kent, in the south-eastern districts, in Somerset and Dorset, in the extreme West, and in Yorkshire. In them the cottage was the factory. Sometimes a single family would perform all the work, the wife and the daughters helped the father and the sons, sometimes workmen assisted who lived with the family, and who belonged to the same class as the master. But oftentimes the weaver had to go outside his own household and distribute his wool at other dwellings. As soon as the cloth was woven the weaver had himself to journey to the market at the nearest town. At Leeds the street called the Briggate was crowded by seven in the morning with men from the surrounding districts. The weaver stood before the table on which his cloth lay, and dealers passed along examining and buying the wares which had been brought in from the adjacent villages.

But the small hand-worker was not solely busied

with his wool and his machines; near the house were usually some acres of arable and pasture-land, the produce of which not only supported the household, but afforded food for cows and a horse. The horse was part of the stock-in-trade, for on it the weaver rode to market, carrying his wares with him. Thus the land about a village near Stockport was divided between fifty and sixty occupiers, of whom not more than six or seven lived on the produce of their farms, every one of the others adding to their agricultural gains some earnings from work as weavers. And around Leeds there was scarcely a farmer who made a living from his land alone. "Agriculture and mechanical industries were sometimes so closely connected that every increase of activity in the one produced an equivalent diminution of it in the other. In winter, when field work was interrupted, the steady hum of the spinning-wheel was to be heard in every chimney-corner. At the time of harvest, on the other hand, the wheel stood idle, and the workers ceased to labour for want of thread. 'From time immemorial,' says the preamble to an Act of 1662, 'the custom is preserved of stopping weaving every year during the harvest, because the spinners, who furnished the weavers with yarn, were all employed in agricultural work.'"<sup>1</sup>

The industrial revolution destroyed these homely industries, with their little groups of domestic

<sup>1</sup> Paul Mantoux, "La Révolution Industrielle au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle," p. 42 (Paris, 1906).

workers,<sup>1</sup> and produced a new class of capitalists who organised labour, employed it systematically in large buildings, and distributed its proceeds throughout the world. Men who had hitherto been concerned with the distribution of the results of the work of the mechanic had "neither improved nor directed that work," they were, in fact, merchants rather than manufacturers, and they were comparatively few and isolated, though often wealthy. By the evolution of industry they became numerous and formed a class, one united by common interests and distinguished by broad general characteristics. "*Les créateurs du système de fabrique ont créé en même temps une classe, une espèce sociale nouvelle.*"<sup>2</sup>

If, during this period of change, we observe the woollen and the silk trade, the iron and the pottery trade, and in these four are contained the four chief industries of England in the eighteenth century, two predominant features—as I have already indicated—are visible; inventive ingenuity in a high degree in some men, commercial and organizing power in an equally high degree in others. John Kay, who was born in 1704, invented, in 1733, the fly shuttle, "the most important improvement ever made in the loom," and<sup>3</sup> one which had momentous consequences for the textile industry. Yet,

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, "Growth of English Industry and Commerce," p. 616.

<sup>2</sup> Mantoux, p. 379.

<sup>3</sup> "Dictionary of National Biography" Art. John Kay.

in spite of the success of this ingenious and famous invention, Kay—essentially a typical man of the industrial revolution—died in poverty in France. In 1716 John Lombe made his adventurous journey to Italy and, at the risk of his life, brought home drawings of machinery which gave a striking stimulus to the silk trade. The inventions of Wyatt (1733-38), the spinning-jenny of Hargreaves (1765), the water-frame of Highs (1768), and the mule of Cranston (1779), indicate the constant and remarkable current of new inventions which were being produced by men born at the beginning of the century.

After many years of failure, the second Abraham Darby, of Coalbrookdale, at length successfully (1735) solved the method of utilizing coal for the production of iron. How much is due to the previous investigations and experiments of Dud Dudley during the seventeenth century and of the elder Darby during the first years of the eighteenth century it is difficult exactly to say; the final successful effort is the salient feature to be remembered: "At last, in 1735, he obtained the result so often tried for. He remained for six days and nights near the blast furnace, with scarcely any sleep and taking his meals beside the furnace. On the evening of the sixth day, after more than one disappointment, the experiment succeeded and the fusion was perfect."<sup>1</sup>

This momentous event in the industrial revolution, one so full of unforeseen consequences for the future

<sup>1</sup> Mantoux, p. 293.

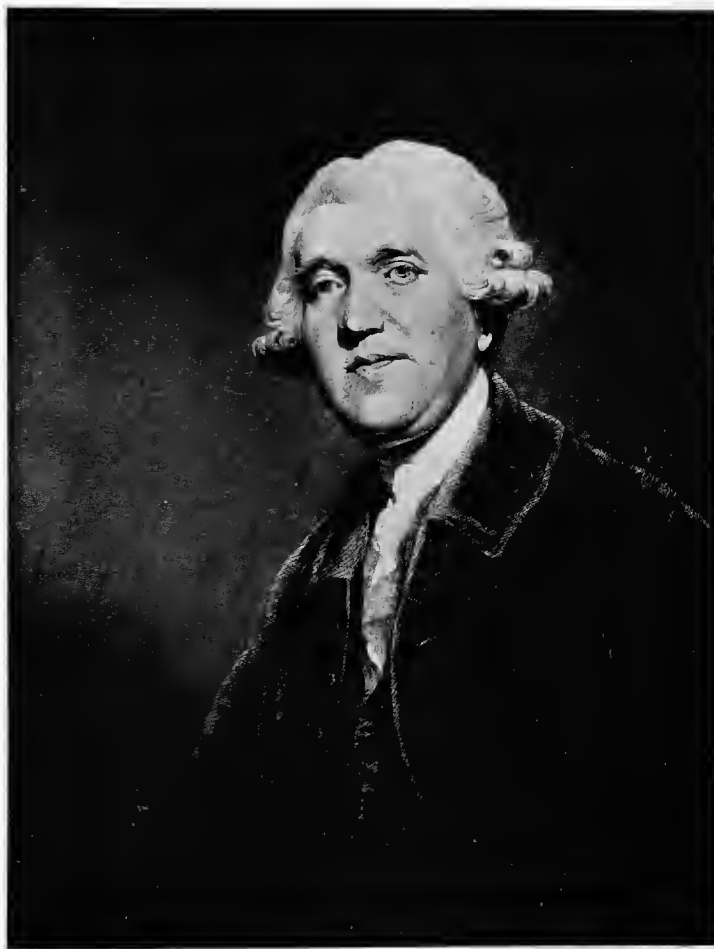
of England, occurred at the very time when discoveries and applications of new methods scarcely less important are to be seen in other than the iron trade. The aggregate marks with the utmost distinctness the unexampled industrial progress of the period, the opening of a new chapter in the development of the English people, the evolution of a new division of men—the industrial capitalist and the industrial inventor. Of these I have already given some examples; but the famous combination of Boulton and Watt is one of the most remarkable. The commercial daring and the sound judgment of the one were equalled by the patient ingenuity of the other, of whom the modern steam engine is the enduring monument.<sup>1</sup>

The career of Wedgwood is another example, and indicates also the breadth of the movement since, with all his energy and capacity as a man of business, the basis of much of his work was artistic and he went for inspiration to Greek models. In 1769 he founded a new manufactory at some distance from Burslem, and called it Etruria; to-day it is the centre of a well-known industrial district. The name has now become popular and commonplace, but it was chosen by Wedgwood to indicate his debt to ancient masters. On June 13, 1769, the inauguration of the new buildings took place. The scene is memorable: "The throwing-room was where the company assembled, and here Mr. Wedgwood, divesting him-

<sup>1</sup> Smiles, "Lives of Boulton and Watt," p. 199.

self of his coat and hat, sat down before the thrower's board, whilst Mr. Bentley turned the wheel. One of the favourite old servants made the balls of clay ready to his master's hand, and others stood by to assist. Thus environed, Mr. Wedgwood, remembering his old mastery in this highest province of the potter's art, threw with great precision six vases in the black basaltes body, averaging about ten inches each in height and five and a half in the widest part. . . . The body, which is of a bluish tinge of black . . . bears on it, painted in two shades of red, a subject taken from a bas-relief in Hamilton's work 'Hercules and his Companions in the Garden of the Hesperides.' The two borders are from the same source. On the reverse side is an inscription to the effect that it is the product of the first day's work at Etrurian Staffordshire, by Wedgwood and Bentley, and within the fillet above the foot are inserted the words 'Artes Etruriæ Renascuntur.'"<sup>1</sup> These words breathe enthusiasm and idealism, and their inscription on his wares was a pregnant sign of the motives which actuated Wedgwood, as well as his contemporaries. The English spirit which urged Drake and his fellows to the Spanish main was pressing the new race on to more peaceful and not less momentous adventures, undertaken with the same courage and patience, the same boldness and hope, as were the voyages of Elizabethan explorers. We can scarcely realize the numerous disappointments, the depressing checks,

<sup>1</sup> Meteyard, "Life of Wedgwood," vol. i. p. 112.



JOSIAH WEDGWOOD.





and the clouded hopes, which darkened the careers of men like Wedgwood, Boulton, and Arkwright. When we honour the skilful inventor and the successful manufacturer, we forget the trials which each passed through, while the men who did not achieve their aim are lost in oblivion.

The extent of the industrial revolution is made more significant by the share which Wedgwood and Bentley took in it and by their application of art to industry, for their work extended over the same period as the discoveries and the organization which changed the old order of things in the textile and metallurgical trades. In this change national characteristics are pre-eminent; the modest words, "business capacity" conceal various qualities, cherished of the Anglo-Saxon race, without which the inventions of ingenious minds would have come to nothing. John Wilkinson was an example of the men, not inventors but watchers of inventions, quick to understand their practical value and to realize the profit to be obtained from them. It was he who built at Bradley, near Wolverhampton, in 1754, the first coke furnace, constructed on the model of those of Coalbrookdale. In 1775 he bought the first steam engine to come from the workshop of Boulton and Watt. The forges at Bradley, where he had been superintendent, became his property in 1772, and he continued to enlarge them, and to obtain fresh foundries in South Wales and tin mines in Cornwall. "The whole formed a veritable king-

dom, an industrial community which Wilkinson ruled with an energetic and autocratic hand." He coined his own money tokens, and these from 1787 to 1808 circulated in the adjoining counties. The great ironmaster was represented on the coins in profile—a bourgeois and rather stout figure. Around the edge were inscribed the simple words: "Wilkinson, Ironmaster."

The first Sir Robert Peel is yet another instance of the capacity of the capitalist to adapt inventions to manufactures. He devoted himself "to explore the power of mechanical combinations, particularly when they could be converted to the use of his own manufacture, and . . . he introduced among his operatives that order, arrangement, and subdivision of employment which form the marked characteristics of the factory system."<sup>1</sup>

Arkwright is a better-known example on whom the fame of an inventor as well as that of a captain of industry has rested. But his celebrity as a man of action is enhanced because it is evident that he was not himself an inventor, but only quick to take advantage of inventions of men less capable than he of utilizing them in practice. Beginning life as an apprentice to a barber and wigmaker at Preston, he died extremely wealthy in 1792, having done more, perhaps, than any other man of his age to apply inventions to practical industry, and to organize labour. It is now clear that for a long time he was

<sup>1</sup> Cooke, "Life of Peel," vol. i. p. 6.

mistakenly regarded as the inventor of the water-frame, which was in fact the invention of Higs, or Hayes, as he is sometimes called. This, however, though very important, was only one of the inventions which Arkwright utilized; others followed, and of each he took full advantage. "He is not an inventor; at the most he arranged, combined, and utilized the inventions of others without the least scruple. The praises lavished on his memory by thoughtless admirers seem now slightly misplaced: it was too much to compare him first to Newton and then to Napoleon, and it was foolish to quote him as an example to prove that capitalist power is founded purely on personal merit and industrious honesty. But it can be said of Arkwright that he succeeded. He was the first to turn to account those inventions of which he was not the author; he was the first to group them into a system. To find the capital necessary to found his establishments, and to form and dissolve the partnerships which he made the successive instruments of his fortune, required an extraordinary talent for business and a singular mixture of cleverness, perseverance, and audacity. He had to display unusual energy and activity in the founding of large factories, the recruiting of hands, in the training of them for the new work, as in the establishment of strict discipline in the workshops. It is he who created the modern factory after the incomplete attempts or failures of the brothers Lombe, of Wyatt, and of Lewis Paul. In

him the new type of the manufacturer became incarnate, differing from engineers and merchants whose principal characteristics he borrows, but adds to them those of his own character as a business promoter, an organizer of development, and a leader of men. He represents a social class and business administration [*régime économique*].

"His name will be for ever inseparable from the origin of mechanical industries. Every factory in the counties of Lancashire and Derby at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries was constructed on the model of his. 'We all had our eyes fixed on him,' said Sir Robert Peel. He knew it, and seemed to endeavour to give an example of an ardent worker and a boundless ambition. He worked incessantly, spending a part of his nights at it; being constantly called away personally to superintend his numerous establishments, he worked on his way in his coach, which was always driven at a great pace. His schemes were always gigantic. One day he remarked, 'If I live long enough, I shall be rich enough to refund the National Debt.'"<sup>1</sup>

It would be impossible to sum up the place of Arkwright in the industrial revolution more truly and more forcibly than has been done in the passage which I have ventured to translate. He represents the energy and the indomitable courage of the industrial explorer, and he is a type of the modern man of business. Arkwright was not the first English-

<sup>1</sup> Mantoux, "La Révolution Industrielle au XVIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle," p. 227.

man to show energy and capacity in the conduct of commercial affairs. The mediaeval Jack of Newbury is a traditional figure, the weaver of Berkshire probably had most of the qualities which tended to the success of Richard Arkwright. But the former was an isolated figure, a man of peace in a warlike time; the latter was typical, an actor in a great movement, one of a class, a figure on a crowded scene. Many lesser but similar figures followed him in his own age, who, if they loomed somewhat less largely before the eyes of the world, were not less capable of success, each differing in individual qualities, some with high aspirations, others aiming at wealth alone. But it is not with the individual that I am here concerned; it is with men who form a collective body, living factors in a momentous national movement, in a series of events more important than great battles.

## CHAPTER XII

### GENERAL INFLUENCE OF THE MEN OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

THE leaders of the Industrial Revolution were none of them men of one idea ; they had a wide outlook, they were essentially sane and practical, and in many ways, outside of their own business, they interested themselves in projects which tended to the progress and prosperity of the community. One may take as an instance the subject of communication between localities. Before 1759 there was not a single canal in England. By 1777 there were eleven separate systems of new artificial waterways, which were mostly due to the initiative and to the pecuniary aid of new chiefs of industry. Wedgwood and Bentley, for example, were indefatigable in pushing through the project of a canal from the Mersey to the Trent. Partly also these undertakings were the results of the enlightened views of some of the larger landowners, especially the second Duke of Bridgewater and Lord Gower. As in the case of the textile industries, there was an inventor, and behind him the indispensable capitalist and organizer ; the brain of Brindley and the money and energy of

the Duke of Bridgewater<sup>1</sup> and Wedgwood, were some of the factors in the development of the forces of communication. This should never be regarded as something separate from the evolution of particular industries. The basis was the same, and it was one of the factors in a complex national development just as much as were the discoveries of Higs and the organization of Arkwright; each factor reacted on the other, and each forms part of the rise of modern industries.

English canals in the latter half of the eighteenth century were, as means of communication, of the first importance; they came into existence to meet a national want, and their decadence commenced when a more rapid system of locomotion, in the shape of railways, supplied the requirements of traders and manufacturers. Canals fell into the hands of, or under the power of, railway companies, chiefly because the primary object of their existence had ceased. If we realize their historical commencement, it may be doubted whether they can ever be again of substantial use and importance in a country of the small size of Great Britain.

The improvement of the highways of the country was also a result of the demand for more convenient communication in the industrial districts. Practical men had long complained of the miserable conditions of English highways. "At Knutsford," wrote Arthur Young, in 1768, "it is impossible to describe

<sup>1</sup> Smiles, "Lives of the Engineers," vol. i. p. 235.

these infernal roads in terms adequate to their deserts." The road to Newcastle-under-Lyme "is in general a paved causeway, as narrow as can be conceived, and cut into perpetual holes, some of these two feet deep measured on the level; a more dreadful road cannot be imagined." But this was not the only highway of which this ubiquitous and observant traveller was forced to complain. The conditions were equally bad all over England.

Nor was Arthur Young the only person to note this fact or to desire the improvement of local highways. Complaints of them were common. Farmers and peasants who were entrusted with their care "know not," wrote a contemporary reformer, "how to lay a foundation, nor make the proper slopes and drains; they pour a heap of stones loose into a swampy hole which make the best of their way to the centre of the earth: "remonstrances and presentments signify nothing; the eloquence of my lords the judges has never prevailed."<sup>1</sup> In the past some public-spirited men had left bequests for the improvement of the roads in the districts where they had lived. But the majority preferred bad roads and freedom rather than passable highways under the management of the State, and hitherto there had never been any collective force capable of pushing on the improvement of English highways.

The necessary impetus came with the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. The leaders

<sup>1</sup> Essay on "Roads," *Gentleman's Magazine* (1752), vol. xxii. p. 519.



of it were not the men to put up with the wretched and inconvenient tracks which had hitherto served the purposes of highways. The Government, too, was friendly. The rebellion of 1745 had been made more dangerous by the difficulty arising from bad roads of moving troops to meet the Young Pretender. But this, though no doubt a factor favourable to the more rapid improvement of the highways, was not the main force. The urgent necessity of good roads for the purposes of trade, and the natural energy now turned into this channel, were the driving forces of the movement.

When men like Wedgwood began to give their thoughts and time to the subject, the efforts of individuals such as Dr. Borlase in Cornwall, and the Reverend James Bentham in the Fen district, had a public opinion to back them up, and they ceased to be voices crying in the wilderness. It is not surprising therefore that between 1760 and 1774 four hundred and fifty-two Acts relating to roads passed through Parliament. Many turnpike trusts were established, and many of the chief highways were taken out of the charge of the parishes and were made fairly sound. It cannot, however, be said that, speaking generally, English main roads have ever been first-rate, and their management has always been characterized by a want of system and of technical knowledge.

But the movement which is summed up in the mere enumeration of a series of Acts of Parliament in

regard to roads had immense general influence. It enabled the pottery of Staffordshire, the hardware of Birmingham, and the importations of Liverpool to be conveyed from one side of England to the other, and it placed individuals in the North in personal communication with those in the South. It enabled the countryman to visit London and the Londoner to go into the provinces. Without the impetus arising from the industrial renaissance, men might have waited long for better roads, and the increasing homogeneity of all classes might have been delayed. Perhaps another and more systematic form of road management might have been evolved. As it was, the efforts of the industrial magnates in these several parts made the management of the trunk highways more efficient, though local management was still left as the basis of the highway system.

Easier communication between town and town, both by land and water, thenceforth began to undermine the local fairs, which had hitherto formed so marked a feature in the economic condition of England. A periodical fair in a local town, such as the great fair at Stourbridge in Cambridgeshire, which lasted from the middle of August to the middle of September, the four considerable annual "marts" at Lynn, Boston, Gainsborough, and Beverley, and smaller fairs in the more important towns of a district, were simple and primitive methods of trade. They implied a cessation of intercourse between buyer and seller, between the maker of cloth and the buyer

of it, for the greater part of the year. Sufficient for the requirements of a domestic system of manufacture, they were inadequate for the needs of a more elaborate, and highly capitalized, system. They were important occurrences in the places where they were held, made as much of as religious festivals or celebrations of national events; they entered largely into the social life of localities, and they created a special class of travelling merchants who moved from one market town and fair to another with long droves of pack-horses. This pre-revolutionary view, picturesque and somewhat archaic, gradually fades away as the industrial revolution gains in power. As the eighteenth century closes, the old order changes, and, under the pressure of the powerful and complex influences which I have indicated, we look on a wholly different scene.

An impartial historical observer in after-years finds it hard to lay hold of cardinal facts, and to ascertain the main forces of progress. It is even more difficult for contemporaries to appreciate the effect of the actions of men of their own age on the future condition of their country. It is not, therefore, surprising that, when we read the letters, diaries, and memoirs of the eighteenth century, we are astonished at the small attention which is given to the details of the industrial progress of the time. That attention was, of course, more difficult then than now, for, in an age of bad roads, of scarce letters, and of occasional newspapers, it was impossible for

an observer in London, however curious, to note all that occurred in other parts of England.

Yet, under the stimulus of mechanical invention and commercial power, the old order was steadily changing in the provincial towns in the rural districts, and the foundations of society were in process of revolution. The two united forces—inventive genius and business energy—were causing the radical changes in English agriculture which took place in the eighteenth century. Some alteration would undoubtedly have occurred without these two factors, for general progress made the communal system of husbandry more and more unsuitable. But when Arthur Young compared large farms to large factories, and when he says that the closer the system of farming is brought to the system of manufacture the better, we at once see the influence which industrial progress had on the minds of many intelligent agriculturists and great proprietors. It is evidence (one fact among many) indicating a national change,<sup>1</sup> one which had momentous consequences, not the least of which was the alteration which it effected in the condition of the peasantry, as will be described on a later page.

The great volume of national energy which in this period was working a peaceful revolution could not be confined within a single channel. It might affect manufactures more than agriculture, but it

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, "Growth of English Industry and Commerce," p. 613.

was bound also to show its influence on that pursuit. When Lord Townshend, in 1730, renounced the career of statesman for that of scientific farmer, and when other aristocratic landowners, Lord Rockingham at Wentworth, the Duke of Bedford at Woburn, and others of less importance, to some extent followed his example, it was a sign that a current of national energy was not only stimulating a particular industry, but also that, under its pressure, the minds of the nobility were being turned to new, and hitherto unthought-of, subjects.

At the same time, the results of the industrial revolution had, apart from the question of national force, a distinct effect on agriculture and the condition of the agricultural labourer. The enclosure of the common lands and the permanent division of the "open fields," separated many of those who had hitherto been attached to it from the land and from particular rural districts. These men were at once drawn towards the new centres of industry, and from that moment began a rural migration which has not yet ceased. The admirable French author to whose work reference has already been made, appositely cites under this head a passage from a work, written in 1758, in which the writer describes the continual movement from rural parishes to market towns, and from these to the capital, and how a crowd of men, born in the country, chose new homes in the towns, and especially in those which were the seat of important indus-

tries. "L'industrie, c'est en effet, pour ces milliers de travailleurs qui ont perdu tout ou partie de leurs ressources habituelles, le seul débouché possible. Le travail que les champs leur refusent, ils vont le demander aux ateliers."<sup>1</sup>

Without new factories and workshops these men must have continued to live on the land; but, as things were, the factory at once absorbed men from the village, and drew them from the land. The factory grew up, not as now, in a populous place, but in a quiet rural village, which was soon transformed into an urban district. Thus Tyldesley, to the south of Bolton, consisted, in 1780, of two farms and eight or nine cottages; by 1795, it had increased to a hundred and sixty-two houses, a church, and contained nine hundred and seventy-six inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Of necessity new industries required hands, and farms and fields were the only recruiting grounds, so that, if there had been no agricultural change taking place, the new and better-paid employment would assuredly have absorbed large portions of the rural population. These men of the Industrial Revolution were not penniless, for yeomen whose small farms were absorbed in larger holdings were able to leave their old homes with a little capital in their pockets. Like the best of the modern emigrants, they departed with the hope, not only of

<sup>1</sup> Mantoux, p. 174. Citing J. Massie, "A Plan for the Establishment of Charity Houses," p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> Mantoux, p. 370.

obtaining employment, but also of enlarging their small fortunes in the new manufacturing world.

This change, beginning in one century and extending into a succeeding century, indicates that the townward migration of the agriculturist was primarily economic, and that the cause of the agricultural exodus was neither shortage of land nor the shortcomings of landlords, but the creation and growth of a new and immense industrial system which destroyed the old dual and combined agricultural and manufacturing systems. That the enclosure of commons and open fields and the enlargement of farms tended to the same exodus there is no doubt, just as at the present time increased facilities of land purchase or hire would have a tendency to cause a certain number of competent men to continue to seek a living by agricultural work in rural districts. Nothing can alter the momentous elementary fact that the industrial revolution was also an agricultural revolution, and that, however desirable and admirable legislation may be to induce and to enable men to till the soil without disturbance and under fair conditions, it cannot bring back the pre-eighteenth century dual system, under which varied domestic manufactures were a strong prop to agriculture, and to agriculture not in one district of the kingdom, but in every quarter of it, and in most dissimilar soils. Domestic manufactures not only brought money into the family till, they also gave stability to agriculture, and reduced its risks and uncertainties,

for poor harvests could to some extent be counter-balanced by industrial labour.

The revolution, therefore, tended not only to the creation of large urban districts, where facilities, such as the proximity of coal mines for manufactures were most obtainable, it also made the rural districts more purely agricultural, diminishing their population almost in proportion to the increase of the urban population. In a word, it settled the face of modern England. In 1700, the most densely populated parts of the kingdom extended from the Bristol Channel eastwards to the coast of Suffolk, the county of Wilts having, outside the London area, a primary place in this zone. In half a century these features were altered. Lancashire now began to show a considerable density of population, and the increase in the West Riding of Yorkshire was marked. By 1801 the country, as exhibited on a population map, had reached its modern condition. The new manufacturing counties were becoming thickly populated, and covered by large towns; while counties like Sussex, which had hitherto supported factories and farms, became purely agricultural.

The same causes inevitably tended to change in the fiscal condition of England. The industrial revolution was unquestionably the primary cause of the movement from protection to free trade. The necessity for the repeal of the Corn Laws commenced when the combined manufacturing and agricultural systems began to be replaced by the new factory system, and



it shows that those who in recent years have advocated a return to protection, so far from moving with the times, are even more antiquated in their theories than is often supposed. The futility of their effort is apparent when the observer notes that whereas before the industrial revolution there was a community in large districts of England capable at once of carrying on industrial work and of supplying its own necessities of life, after that memorable event the industrial centres were so populous that the purely agricultural districts were unable to support them. A change, therefore, in the fiscal system of England was a certain and a direct result of the change from the old manufacturing order to the new.

But the old system, which began to disappear towards the middle of the eighteenth century, was not, any more than the new, a utopia. Each had its special merits and defects. Complaints of small pay and of too long hours were heard before, as after, the industrial revolution, and the imperfections of society were visible then, as now. It is not relevant to endeavour to estimate and compare the relative happiness of workers under the old and new systems ; it is sufficient to show, in a few words, the immense social change produced by the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century. This was not less among the middle class than among the artisans and labourers of the kingdom. The yeoman was replaced by the master manufacturer, who presently found his way into Parliament, often, as in the case of the first Sir

Robert Peel, who became a member of Parliament in 1790, as a sound Conservative. Sometimes he became a landowner, sometimes even a peer, or his family married into the peerage.

The industrial revolution, by the fortunate circumstances of the English constitution, while it changed society personally, actually fortified this existing constitution, and, by uniting it more closely to the body of the people, prevented a rapid decline in the power of the nobility. A few merchants had heretofore from time to time become landowners, but the industrial revolution enlarged and immensely strengthened the connection between the proprietary interest in land and the capitalist interest in manufactures. Its results in this respect were exactly the reverse of those of the contemporaneous revolution in France. It was thus politically not a revolution at all, for though it introduced personal changes, it did not alter the basis of the national system of government or of land tenure, and became in fact a conservative element in the evolution of English society. The most striking political result was the Reform Act of 1832; but, though this was a step towards a more democratic government, it did not affect the established order of the Constitution.

The first Sir Robert Peel is an example of the transformation of the yeoman. His father was one of those men, partly yeoman, partly domestic manufacturer, from whom the new body of manufacturers, the chiefs of industry, the mainstay of the up-

springing middle class, were recruited. It was largely in their forefathers that the indomitable and calm courage, the patience, and the perseverance which characterized the soldiers of Cromwell were found. They lived habitually a life of toil, their physique, as befitted countrymen, was strong; they were intelligent in mind and energetic in character. They were the very men to carry into practical effect the ingenious inventions of those who wanted qualities necessary for commercial success.

Joshua Fielden was yet another example. He, too, cultivated the paternal acres, and worked at the machinery installed in his house, going sometimes to sell his wares at Halifax. Jedediah Strutt, the son of an agriculturist and stocking-maker near Derby, was also an industrial pioneer.

Examples, however interesting, cannot do more than arouse the active imagination which is required to realize the great movement on the scene before us. Hitherto there had been no commercial homogeneity. Men of business had been few, and had been isolated, and they had had little political weight except in the city of London. Now, the growth of industrialism in the North and in the Midlands of England was producing a class which was ready to act and to work together in the common interest. The spirit of English political freedom extended to another sphere, and the habits of centuries affected industrial movements: "*C'est par un mouvement tout naturel, et conformément à*

d'innombrables précédents que les grands industriels furent amenés à se concerter en vue de certaines démarches pratiques." The industrial revolution in its results was thus a natural sequel of the constitutional and religious conflicts of past years, and the political capacity of the people trained by centuries of usage, now adapted itself to industrial objects. Nowhere in these changes do we see the least trace of State initiative or of State management. Everywhere the individual Englishman is the sole factor, at times and under some circumstances strengthened by common action.

From these men of the industrial revolution of the eighteenth century largely sprang a new middle class. Men of business and professional men had hitherto been isolated; there had been no corporate social feeling. The number of well-to-do families produced by the new movement, at once intelligent and energetic, not only increased self-respect and reasonable pride but gave as well a more intellectual stamp to the middle class. Burke was one of the few who noted the change, if he did not seize all its significance. He wrote to Mrs. Crewe:

"What you say of all the squires, especially those of the second and third class of fortunes, is fatally but too true. They are inferior to the merchant and manufacturing castes. It is a pity. This in itself is a woeful revolution; for that class of men were formerly the hope, the pride, and the strength of the country. They are infinitely reduced in their numbers,

and if those who remain are reduced too in other respects, it is a bad story.”<sup>1</sup>

Johnson, when he visited Birmingham and passed through Boulton's warehouse saw nothing more than a shop full of interesting objects. He did not perceive that it was evidence of the industrial birth of a new social class. And whilst Horace Walpole chronicled the daily doings of fine gentlemen and ladies in London, this great movement and these unobtrusive individuals were altering the very society of which he was an interested observer. The importance, however, of the movement and of the men was nowhere less appreciated than in the West End of London, to which the gossip of clever diarists and letter-writers has given an undue prominence. That society had its remarkable and significant characteristics; but the future of England was being daily moulded, less by politicians at Westminster and by wits in St. James's Street, than by a new class which was working perseveringly and energetically among the factories of Lancashire and the Midlands—the Men of the Industrial Revolution.

<sup>1</sup> Burke to Mrs. Crewe, November 7, 1796, “Works” (Ed. 1852), ii. p. 317.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE NEW PROVINCIAL CITIZEN

THE New Provincial Citizen was the result in another sphere of the same causes which produced the Men of the Industrial Revolution who were described in preceding chapters.

From the middle of the eighteenth century the New Provincial Citizen is a figure of the first importance on the scene. Neither man of letters nor politician, the details of his life were not such as to make him famous, and the story of his deeds must be sought for in obscure local biographies and records. A tiresome toil, involving the collection of many isolated and apparently insignificant facts in the course of comparatively humble lives is needful if we would obtain some definite conception of this particular Englishman. His life was in fact so modest and so non-political that one cannot feel surprised if neither his contemporaries nor his successors appreciated either the remarkable significance or the power of this man as an element in the social movement of his time.

Yet the New Provincial Citizen began a new era in English municipal history by showing his possession

of civic virtue, by an active, patient, and unostentatious well-doing for the public good. One of the impressive and rapidly increasing middle class, among the Englishmen of the eighteenth century he is remarkable, because, in the first place, he personified a permanent change in English ideals, and next, because he is as striking a contrast to the Londoner, as to his country-neighbours who were for the most part still stupid and ignorant. The inhabitant of the metropolis was already becoming noticeable for that want of local public spirit which has ever since been characteristic of him at the very time that the new provincial citizen, by reason of his provincialism with its clear limitations, was every day showing himself to be a better citizen. His mind and efforts were concentrated on the affairs of his own town. Around the city of London, which was losing its individuality as a self-governing commercial community, and which in past times had exhibited commercial energy united to civic pride, was springing up an enormous and ill-assorted town with divergent interests, whose inhabitants were growing up without the feeling of citizenship.

At this moment, when the civic life of London was growing weaker, important towns—especially Birmingham and Manchester—were coming into existence in the provinces; every enlargement of their area stimulated the public spirit of a section of their people, and the increase of their wealth was followed by an increase in the civic responsibility of leading citizens. Behind them, if they were comprised in the new

manufacturing communities, there did not lie centuries of town life. The mediaeval boroughs had some corporate life when the new eighteenth-century towns were mere villages and hamlets,<sup>1</sup> and for the most part these were still almost unorganized or organized only on primitive unincorporated systems. The new citizen looked, therefore, entirely to the future; he was uninfluenced by the conservatism of a famous past, and, at the moment at which we are surveying the scene, he was essentially the man of the immediate future, the maker of England for the next hundred years.

The satisfactory growth of the new towns, based, as it was, on ideals, and directed to objects, unknown to the inhabitants of mediaeval boroughs, was impossible without energy and capacity on the part of their people. Their reputation in the future depended on the qualities of their citizens, not on historic fame. The Industrial Revolution, produced by inventive genius and commercial energy, was the most potent cause of the growth of the new communities, and it changed and enlarged the character of older places. The new manufacturer and man of business was thus in a large measure the new citizen, and he brought to his duties as a citizen the same practical qualities

<sup>1</sup> Even in the eighteenth century some of the new towns were regarded as little better than large villages. Thus Dr. William Stukely described Manchester in his "*Itinerarium Curiosum*," 1724, as "The most rich, populous, and busy village in England." (Axon, "*Annals of Manchester*," p. 78.)



which he showed as a man of affairs. It was his ambition to unite success in business to a wholesome influence on the public life of the community in which he lived, to direct civic energy to various forms of public benefit; the establishment of schools, the creation and management of hospitals and similar institutions, the improvement of highways and streets and of the postal service, the building of churches, of chapels, and of libraries—to every object which tended to the happiness and health of the people.

In every one of the growing towns, and in some of the older and more famous cities, groups of provincial citizens—keenly conscious of the shortcomings of the age, themselves for the most part self-educated—with more or less energy and more or less success were to be seen throughout the last half of the century exerting themselves for these and similar objects. The pious founder and benefactor figures, it is true, in the long history of every English town; but he was an isolated personage, and his good intentions were usually shown by a gift of money or lands on his death-bed. But the new provincial citizen evidenced his civic virtues in his lifetime, and chiefly by collective action.

Humphrey Chetham, at the end of the seventeenth century, devoting his surplus income in the very last years of his life to the maintenance of poor boys, and leaving handsome legacies for the foundation and upkeep of a library and a hospital which have long been famous in Manchester, is a less admirable figure

than Mathew Boulton towards the close of the eighteenth century, in the prime of life, amidst a multitude of private and public affairs, undertaking the irksome but useful work of treasurer of the Birmingham dispensary. One represents the benevolence of the Middle Ages, which was primarily religious and selfish, the other the more altruistic ideals of the modern citizen. Self-defence and self-aggrandisement shown on the town council and in the guild were the object of mediaeval collective action, but the joint action of the provincials of the eighteenth century tend to more unselfish purposes to the good of the whole community, either by means of municipal, or philanthropic, labour.

Ralph Allen of Bath—of whom I have already spoken—the patron and friend of men of letters, alderman, philanthropist, and postal reformer, rich, charitable, energetic, and self-made, is an admirable example of the new provincial citizen who was not an inhabitant of the new manufacturing towns. He was improving the moral and sanitary condition of Bath by personal exertion and liberal gifts<sup>1</sup> not long before Robert Raikes, the affluent and energetic journalist and newspaper proprietor of Gloucester, was in his own ancient city reforming the prisons, establishing an infirmary and a course of elementary secular and religious education on the Sunday.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Peach, "The Life and Times of Ralph Allen," p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Raikes is called the founder of Sunday schools. Children had been taught on Sundays before 1780; his real merit was in arranging for the systematic teaching of the children of Gloucester in secular and religious subjects on a day when they were idle. There was

The tasks of the provincial citizen were essentially practical, one may even say humdrum; all his work was of a quiet and unsensational kind. It was not based on abstract theories, but throughout it there was apparent a clear recognition of the right of every human being to have an opportunity of a decent and of a happy existence, and a perception of civic duty—of active endeavour for the improvement of the community as a whole. In the movement which the citizen now initiated he was left free by the central government to work out his own and his neighbours' municipal salvation, and it was partly for this reason that the general political temperature was so low in the eighteenth century, and that the rising provincial citizen was politically contented and not seldom politically conservative. For his chief interest in parliamentary affairs was concerned with measures which affected him in his business and his locality, with a Fustian or a Turnpike Bill. It was because the central government left him alone in regard to such matters, and was not unwilling to listen to his suggestions if a measure affected him

then no proper elementary education on week-days: Raikes's schools were not merely collections of children for a few Bible lessons for half an hour, they were the pioneers of English elementary education. In Liverpool in 1784 "a group of Sunday schools was to be started, the children were to go to school at one o'clock every Sunday, and to be kept till evening comes on. They were to be taught to read and write, and as soon as they could read well to be taken to church. Somewhat modified, the scheme was carried out on a large scale, and it formed the first beginning of popular education in Liverpool." (Muir, "History of Liverpool," p. 287.)

locally, that he was not by any means dissatisfied with the existing system. His mind and his time were occupied with local affairs, and it was not until he had set his municipal house to some extent in order that he awoke to the need of the political changes which culminated in the Reform Bill of 1832, the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, and the abolition of protection when nearly half the nineteenth century had run its course.

The leading citizen of the eighteenth century outside the capital, whether an inhabitant of a new town in the North or of an old and flourishing city in the West, was frequently a social and municipal reformer, and was content for the time being to occupy himself outside his business hours—for he was essentially a man of business—with these matters. His reforms now seem exceedingly elementary and simple, but we perceive that the man was an extraordinarily important element in the evolution of English society the moment we realise what his ideals were. He represents a moral force unconnected with a church or a creed, the outcome of the traditions and of the evolution of the English people during several centuries, and he is himself the child of a union of unprecedented freedom with equally unprecedented industrial opportunities. In a country with a centralised administration, and without local freedom, he could never have existed, and one may say that he would have been impossible without the English political temperament. This temperament

was the result of the political growth of the English people, of gradual progress, and of freedom gained bit by bit. And his actions at this time tended not only to the increase of individuality and of personal responsibility in public affairs, but inevitably also to certain definite political consequences which resulted eventually in changes in the English Constitution. They were delayed by the French Revolution, which retarded the efforts of Liberal citizens by reason of the fear of revolutionary change produced in the minds of the great mass of moderate men by the excesses of the French Republicans. Still, the provincial citizen, when he had become his own master in his own city, would not afterwards put up with another master in national affairs. He was so imbued with common sense, however, that as long as he was left free to manage his local business, he was in no hurry to alter the Constitution. He was so little of a theorist, so satisfied to carry out changes under existing conditions of local government, that he sometimes went so far as to be content with an imperfect administrative system if his industrial initiative was left unfettered.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Walker, one of the most energetic of Manchester merchants, was, in 1790, elected borough reeve of Manchester, and, with two constables, was appointed actually to govern the town. In 1794 he wrote, "I think I could show that the town of Manchester owes much of its wealth and importance to its unincorporate character. It has been observed with great truth that towns where manufactures are most flourishing are seldom bodies corporate, commerce requiring universal encouragement instead of exclusive

Contemporaneously with a desire to better the condition of his fellows came a wish to improve himself in co-operation with his friends, and so the new citizen helped to found literary and philosophical institutes and societies, book clubs, circulating libraries, and debating societies, such as the Robin Hood Free Debating Society and the Amicable Debating Society, which were established in Birmingham in 1774.<sup>1</sup> Reading and discussion thus became by the end of the century common pastimes of the intelligent provincial citizen, creating a new mental and intellectual atmosphere which was a marked advance over the prevailing tone of previous years. A book club or a debating society—almost trivial as they now seem to us—once established in a provincial town, its influence was in the eighteenth century incomparably greater than that of the same kind of body in modern times. An urban community was sufficiently small to be affected as a whole by the intellectual influence of a group of prosperous, intelligent, and earnest men.

The provincial citizen had his theatre, as well as his books and his discussions. In this respect the difficulty of locomotion was for him a piece of good fortune, for it caused every considerable town to have its resident company of actors who,

privileges to the natives and freemen of a particular district.”—“A Review of some Political Events which have Occurred in Manchester in the Last Five Years,” p. 23.

<sup>1</sup> Langford, “A Century of Birmingham Life,” p. 239.

from time to time, moved away to adjacent towns if there were any of sufficient importance in proximity to their own head-quarters, but who were mainly resident in one centre, giving the citizens a permanent place of rational amusement.<sup>1</sup> The same causes which contributed to a permanent provincial theatre influenced art, and the provincial citizen who had means was becoming a patron of painters, in whom, if they chanced to live in his own town or district, he took a local pride. In London the artist depended on a more varied circle of patrons—on the aristocracy more than on the middle class, but the local painter subsisted chiefly on commissions from the provincial citizen and from the local magnate of the country-side. Mediaeval amusements, such as bull-baiting and dog-fighting, died hard, and there were many of the provincial citizens who did not scruple to indulge in such pastimes; but these were steadily ceasing to have the attraction which they once possessed, and they existed under increasing criticism and protest from the new citizen.

Out-of-doors, the new townsman was in a fortunate position. If he were wealthy, he sometimes had his country-house at no great distance from the town; but even if he lived within the limits of the town, he had his garden with its flowers, its bowling-alley, and its summer-house in which not a little time was spent, and which was sometimes so elaborate as to be a

<sup>1</sup> "The company at Norwich used to go from time to time to Great Yarmouth." Palmer, "Perlustration of Great Yarmouth," p. 352.

miniature dwelling. He was able, through his increasing affluence, and owing to better roads, to pay a visit to Bath or to Tunbridge Wells, to Matlock or to Cheltenham which became popular in the North and the Midlands. If he were more energetic than his fellows, he enjoyed a tour in some part of England, and he liked especially to visit famous houses in which picture galleries, filled with examples of Old Masters gathered in more than one Grand Tour, appealed to his rising appreciation of art. Rivers as yet unpolluted gave him an opportunity to angle near his home, and in the Midlands and the North the new citizen was often a keen fisherman. But he was not a fox-hunter, and race-meetings were as yet chiefly patronized by the country gentry, and by the inhabitants of the old-fashioned country towns, who had little in common with the new citizen. For his was a strenuous life, founded on new ideals and ambitions as yet incapable of being appreciated by the majority of his contemporaries.

Every provincial citizen was not a Ralph Allen, a Mathew Boulton, or a Thomas Wright, each of whom represented in a high degree the aims of the new townsman—aims which hitherto had not existed. Still, a combination of energy, culture, and humanism now became a prominent and remarkable feature of the more influential and admirable inhabitants of the larger cities, gradually influencing the whole community and changing the national tone. The enthusiasm which, during the greater



part of the century, was so much derided, entered considerably into the temperament of the new citizen, though it was hidden by a characteristic reserve, and never carried him beyond the bounds of common sense. He illustrated once again the capacity of the English people to effect revolutions, the importance of which was scarcely perceptible to the men of the age in which the movement occurred.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE WOMAN OF LETTERS

As we further scan the scene, we perceive, towards the second half of the century, an unobtrusive figure, scarcely perceptible in the crowd,—the woman of letters, like the men whom we have just analysed, an inevitable offspring of the time spirit. She springs up—though anything but complete—a new personality, at once eager and apologetic, uncertain of her footing and indefinite in her aims. To become in those days a woman of letters implied the assertion of a form of feminine individual independence opposed to existing social traditions, one which was in a sense a revolt against prevailing ideas. The woman of letters in that age was therefore frequently afraid that she was acting in a manner which was censurable and, even when successful in her efforts, she was not altogether satisfied with her position.

In the memoir of Mrs. Radcliffe, the novelist, written with the sanction of her husband, and which is prefixed to the romance of “Gaston de Blondville,” published after her death, are two statements which to-day seem ludicrous, but which are illustrative of the position in the eighteenth century of the woman

of letters. "There was also," the writer adds, "in the feeling of old gentility, which most of her relatives cherished, a natural repugnance to authorship, which she never entirely lost even after her splendid success was ensured, and she had found herself the creator of a new class in English romances."<sup>1</sup> And the antagonism between gentility and the profession of letters is emphasised, a few pages farther on, still more markedly: "Nothing could tempt her to sink for a moment the gentlewoman in the novelist."

In this beginning of a phase of modern feminism, those who can accurately be termed women of letters are so few that they do not form a class, or a separate section of society, which can be described by generic characterization. Their rare figures, pioneers of a multitude of later writers, and unconscious leaders in the rebellion of the woman against the mastery of the man, are all the more remarkable. We will select a small group, and study the members of it individually, since they are representatives of distinct forms of literature. At once we summon before us Fanny Burney, Anna Seward, and Ann Radcliffe. The name of Elizabeth Carter may occur to some readers, but she was rather the scholarly student than the woman of letters, whilst Hannah More, after a versatile literary youth, became absorbed in philanthropy and social reforms. Every one however, reads at some time the novels of Fanny

<sup>1</sup> "The Posthumous Works of Ann Radcliffe, to which is prefixed a Memoir of the Authoress," vol. i. p. 7.

Burney, for she is an English classic, but one may well suppose that the poetry of Miss Seward is only taken down from a dusty shelf by a curious student. As to Mrs. Radcliffe, her thrilling romances are wellnigh forgotten, though they are still quite as readable as many stories that now obtain popular perusal.

In her day Miss Seward the poet was as much a celebrity as Miss Burney the novelist. The writing of verse was as fashionable as needlework, and so common that Horace Walpole professed to be bored by it. But the difference which we first note between Fanny Burney and Anna Seward is that one was a star of the capital, the other of the quiet cathedral town of Lichfield. "If there is a part of England peculiarly sacred to literature and the muses it is Lichfield. It is the land of poetry itself, and as long as the names of Garrick, of Johnson, and of Seward shall endure, Lichfield will live renowned."<sup>1</sup> So wrote a traveller in 1791. It does not matter that to-day the verses of Miss Seward will scarcely bear perusal; much that is now printed will eventually share its fate; the point of interest is that Miss Seward was a prominent woman of letters in the eighteenth century, and that nearly everything she wrote pleased the taste of the time, and was popular, whether it was in the nature of a patriotic piece

<sup>1</sup> "A Tour through the South of England, Wales, and part of Ireland, made in the Summer of 1791," quoted in Lucas, "A Swan and her Friends," p. 79.

such as the "Monody on Major André," (1781 or a sentimental "poetical novel" like "Louisa."

Not one of these women was a literary trifle, a journalistic hack, or a mere book-maker. We must distinguish, too, the woman of letters from those who posed as such—the blue stocking and the literary entertainer. Mrs. Montagu, like Mrs. Piozzi, and like Lady Miller of Bath Easton fame, was only a clever woman with literary leanings and a long purse, who liked to surround herself with, and to patronise and entertain, men of letters. The mistresses of the Parisian salons—Madame du Deffand and Madame Geoffrin, for example—were not women of letters; they were clever and cultivated ladies, who presided over "intellectual exchanges,"<sup>1</sup> and that was in fact the function—though with marked differences—of these, and some other English hostesses. Both Fanny Burney and Anna Seward regarded literature as an art. Indeed, it is one of the little ironies of literary history that Miss Seward, who gave so much pains to her work, and in whom lived, as she rather pathetically wrote—

"The hope, that yet my verse-encircled themes,  
Buoyant may rise above oblivion's streams,"

has departed into the literary unknown. That, again, is not immaterial to our present purpose, which is to depict the character of the literary woman of the eighteenth century, and, in connexion with her

<sup>1</sup> Helen Clergue, "The Salon," p. 20.

to note the genesis of an influential form of modern feminism.

Anna Seward was a woman with both mental and physical attractions. Her father, the Reverend Thomas Seward, became a Canon Residentiary of Lichfield Cathedral and, in 1754, came to live in the Bishop's Palace, thenceforth the home of the Swan of Lichfield, as she was called, till her death in 1809. Her life was no more eventful, with its domestic joys and sorrows, its personal likes and dislikes, betrothals and marriages of friends, than that of the daughter of any other clergyman in any other cathedral city of England in the eighteenth century. But Miss Seward succeeded by her writings in obtaining contemporary fame as a woman of letters, and she was a close and lifelong student of literature. It is to her credit that she formed independent judgments, which are, however, singularly wanting in insight into literary values. "Wordsworth has genius," she wrote, in 1798, "but his poetry is harsh, turgid, and obscure." But even in her failures as a critic she is illustrative of her age and of its ideas, and of the new strivings of women of ability to take a substantial and an individual part in the intellectual life of the time. The sentimentality which pervades all her writings reflects the sentimentality which characterised the women of the middle class of the eighteenth century. When Hayley, a second-rate poet, stayed at Lichfield, she composed an "Epistle to William Hayley." Having



ANNA SEWARD.





accompanied her guest on part of his journey, she concludes by a description of her return home :

“ And now the clamorous bell’s unwelcome peal  
Calls me, reluctant, to the cheerless meal ;  
No bounding step along the hall I hear,  
But turn my head, and hide the starting tear.”<sup>1</sup>

One regrets that an affectionate nature should make itself ridiculous by such an absence of perception of the relations between expression and feeling as is shown in these lines. Of this feature of the time something has already been said,<sup>2</sup> but the sickliness and affectation of nearly all Miss Seward’s poems—Elegies, Monodies, and Epistles—make them in many respects now more valuable, because she shows herself a typical woman of letters of her age, hampered by conventionality, but seeking after individuality.

It must be said in Miss Seward’s favour that she possessed a sensitive appreciation of the beauties of the country, but unfortunately she could seldom write of them in a natural manner. In the “Anniversary,” written in June, 1767, she begins with an apt description of Lichfield—

“ Ah, lovely Lichfield, that so long hast shone,  
In blended charms peculiarly thine own ;  
Stately, yet rural ; through thy choral day,  
Though shady, cheerful, and though quiet, gay,”

But she soon drifts among “groves,” and “vernal suns,” and “bowers.” In fact, the moment she

<sup>1</sup> “Poetical Works,” vol. ii. p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> Ante, p. 169.

began to describe she posed with her pen ; yet, even in this respect, she is a representative figure, as appreciative as a modern writer of natural features, but unable to escape from a literary mannerism which prevented the simple description of a sunset or a dawn.

Had Anna Seward lived in the environment of Fanny Burney and not in a cathedral town, it may be she would have had a truer sense of literary proportion as well as of intellectual values ; but in that case perhaps she would not have been an author, and so we of a later generation would have lost a typical figure on the scene before us.

Mrs. Radcliffe was by temperament so quiet and retiring, her five romances, "The Castles of Athlin and Dunboyne," "A Sicilian Romance," "The Romance of the Forest," "The Mysteries of Udolpho," and "The Italian," published in her lifetime, were all issued within so short a period—from 1789 to 1797—that even to her contemporaries she was a little-known figure. She blazed in the literary horizon for a brief space, and then disappeared. Yet she had the attributes of a woman of letters, and the many descriptive notes of her English tours have some of the insight, the simplicity, and the charm of the delightful journals of Dorothy Wordsworth. A greater contrast there could not be than the quiet realism of these notes—"the sea in gloom with gleams of cold, silver light, where the clouds begin to break," and "distant lights appearing from the ships successively, as the evening deepened, like glow-

worms, and dotting the waters far around"—with the unreality of her imaginative romances, filled with crime and mystery. Never indeed did a more normal and cheerful creature supply the public with horrors to the full. With ample means and leisure, gifted with an unusually vivid imagination and a considerable capacity of expression, Mrs. Radcliffe might easily have been the authoress of a long series of romances. Publishers paid her well; for "The Mysteries of Udolpho" she received £500, for "The Italian," though shorter, the payment was £800. But an obvious dislike of publicity, springing to some extent from the novelty of the position of the woman of letters in her day, caused Mrs. Radcliffe to prefer a lettered ease to literary fame, so that years before her death she was supposed by the world at large to be no longer alive. But she remains a distinctive figure on the scene. The Old English Baron (1777), of Clara Reeve, had already interested many readers, and Walpole's "Castle of Otranto" (1764) had had considerable vogue, but Mrs. Radcliffe was the first writer to popularize the modern romantic novel.

Fanny Burney is a more attractive personality than sentimental Anna Seward or than the indistinct figure of Ann Radcliffe. She is typical of the woman of letters of the capital, as Miss Seward is of the *précieuse* of the country town. In comparing these two figures, we are struck by the absence of pose in the one, and the very serious manner in which the other took herself. In these points each exhibits the par-

ticular and constant characteristics of the Londoner and the provincial. Again, Fanny Burney was the centre of a famous circle; Johnson and Goldsmith, the Thrales, and the French émigrés in the last decade of the century, overwhelm shrewd Dr. Erasmus Darwin and the less distinguished visitors to Lichfield, who are to be noted around Anna Seward. Personally unimpressive, and of no great intellectual power, Fanny Burney hardly ever said a word or wrote a sentence which contained a thought worth remembering. But this absence of conspicuous gifts was more than counterbalanced by a singular union of delicate qualities, for she united an inborn and modest sagacity to a vivacity of manner, a gaiety of heart, and a sense of humour.

The high spirits of Miss Burney were kept in check by a sensitiveness which often resulted in shyness, and by a sweet and loving temper, which, combined with susceptibility and instinctive intelligence, gave her so much charm that every one who knew her liked her. Hers was a character the attraction of which it is difficult for us to realize, just as no description can convey mobility of feature or the glance and light of the eye. Men like Johnson and Burke, and women like Mrs. Delany and Mrs. Thrale, would never have had so warm an affection for Fanny Burney had she not possessed a personal charm which we, never having seen her, cannot possibly appreciate. If, however, this tradition of individual charm were all that remained, Fanny Burney would now be little

more than a name; but she had the good fortune to have been born with unique intellectual characteristics. She was gifted with an unusually quick perception of the more superficial aspects of character, and she was endowed with an abnormal desire and capacity to record her mental impressions. Only sixteen when she began what is known as her "Early Diary," one of the first passages which she wrote in the summer-house at King's Lynn is this :

"I always spend the evening, sometimes all the afternoon, in this sweet cabin—except sometimes, when unusually thoughtful, I prefer the garden. . . . I cannot express the pleasure I have in writing down my thoughts, at the very moment, my opinion of people when I first see them, and how I alter or how I confirm myself in it; and I am much deceived in my foresight if I shall not have very great delight in reading this living proof of my manner of passing my time, my sentiments, my thoughts of people I know, and a thousand other things in future."<sup>1</sup>

This inborn love of the observation of character was in process of constant cultivation from the time she could write a word, and the desire to record what she calls her "opinion"—a result not of analytical judgment but of abnormal perception, "an instinct throned in reason's place"—was so keen that she found material in the slightest circumstances of daily

<sup>1</sup> "Early Diary," vol. i. p. 13.

domestic and social existence which possessed the least human interest. A diary, and letters written from childhood to old age, present lively pictures of friends and acquaintances, of her social environment, and of the personal characteristics of those whom she met from day to day and from week to week.

Her five novels are of value and interest for our present purpose because they are supplementary to her own records, and contain, in the form of stories, a collection of illustrative characters. Fanny Burney is the heroine of each. She is both Evelina and Cecilia, and Evelina and Cecilia are Fanny Burney, in a series of imaginary situations, saying and writing what Fanny Burney would say and write under the like circumstances. "She found in the abilities of Mrs. Delville sources inexhaustible of entertainment." For Mrs. Delville read Mrs. Thrale or Mrs. Montagu, and fiction at once becomes fact. Most of the characters whom her heroines meet in the course of so much of their lives as she presents to us are people with those outward characteristics, more or less emphasized, whom Fanny Burney has seen, or spoken to, or been told of. Mr. Briggs, the miser in "*Cecilia*," is as much a true character—it has been said that he was drawn from Nollekens the sculptor—as "Mr. Turbulent" in the "*Diary*," otherwise the Reverend Charles de Guiffardiére, the Queen's French reader, who seems to have tried to carry on a ridiculous flirtation by a mixture of rodomontade and sentiment,



FANNY BURNEY (MADAME D'ARBLAY).





In fact, the mere sight of a man or woman in society without actual personal acquaintance was sufficient foundation on which Fanny Burney's lively imagination could construct a character, by means of her acute perception, more or less true to life.

Fanny Burney was born one of the middle class at the very time when a part of that increasing section of English society, both in London and in the large provincial towns, was endeavouring to become cultivated, and was breaking out of the narrow social and intellectual bounds within which it had hitherto been content to live. The character of her father, his versatility and love of music, his energy and his sociability, stimulated her natural intelligence, while the whole Burney family was marked alike by "sweetness and light." Fanny Burney was thus a typical middle-class girl of the new order, ever seeking in her Diary and novels to emphasize the attractions of wit, intelligence, and refinement. "The delicacy of her mind," she writes, when describing the position of Cecilia on the death of her old friend, Mrs. Charlton, "and the refinement of her ideas had now rendered her fastidious, and she would have looked out for elegancies and talents to which Mrs. Charlton had no pretensions, but those who live in the country have little power of selection; confined to a small circle, they must be content with what it offers."<sup>1</sup>

Fanny Burney did not practise what she preached; her desire was to find friends who had delicacy

<sup>1</sup> "Cecilia," bk. iii. chap. 9.

of mind and refinement of ideas. She possessed each herself, and each was in a more or less degree characteristic of the new woman of the day; but these qualities, among some, were exaggerated into prudery and affectation, and a contempt for plain common sense which was sometimes entirely wanting in those who prided themselves both on their wit and learning. Fanny Burney never disguises her dislike for disagreeable people. She depicts stupidity and boorishness with contemptuous pleasure, the well-to-do Braughton family, from the shop in Snow Hill, with their vulgarity and intellectual provincialism, their limited stock of ideas, their class prejudices, and their want of taste, are to her vividly representative of an unattractive section of city mercantile society. And, when she makes old Briggs exclaim to Cecilia, "Books! What do you want with books? do no good; all lost time; words get no cash," she is holding up to ridicule a whole class of men who are yet by no means extinct. The satisfaction with which she narrates examples of unspontaneous humour and superficial cleverness is equally evident throughout her books.

A weakness of the middle class of the eighteenth century is obvious alike in her appreciation of mere accomplishments, and in her absurd delineations of the aristocracy and those who were allied to it. She perceives that peers and peeresses belong to a rank above hers; she is in awe of them, but yet she has for them the jealousy of the professional and trading classes,

From her ignorance of them she makes the amiable Lord Orville a perfectly colourless peer, while Sir Clement Willoughby and Sir Robert Floyer are conventional aristocratic rakes.

For this bad opinion of some of the nobility they had only themselves to thank. The Duke of Queensberry never concealed his vices, and Dr. Burney when he lived at Lynn was one of those who assembled around the third Lord Orford's table at Haughton, at the head of which always sat a person named Patty: every one "addressed her by the same free appellation."

Fanny Burney was so observant and so quick that she caught in an instant everything which Dr. Burney said, and while Lord Orford would thus suitably sit to her as a rake, Fulk Greville, who was always trying to be uncommon, and who called everything that was convention, "fogrum," was the typical man of the *ton*. Mr. Delvile, who is presented as an aristocrat, says to his son, of an Eton and Oxford friend: "We know he is not a man of rank, and whatever he may be he cannot become a man of family, and, consequently, for Mortimer Delvile he is no companion," is depicted with such exaggeration in his pride and pomposity that he becomes a burlesque of reality. But the very exaggeration arises because the writer is aware that the aristocracy is a class distinct from and higher than her own, and she supposes that they speak and act differently from other people, and have manners and feelings as grandiose

as their equipages. Yet at the same time she is jealous of them, so that while she envies, she holds them up to contempt. She writes of the aristocracy as men and women of the middle classes talked of them, and we can see clearly the social relations then existing between two great sections of the English people, their approaching proximity, the gradual breaking down of long-existing social barriers. On the one side were respect and contempt, timidity and envy, doubt and ambition; on the other, condescension and politeness, arbitrariness and some perception of the rise of a new power.

It is surprising that this middle-class young woman with her intellectual ambition and suburban prejudices should become a Court lady, and fill a place which was one of those usually occupied by the daughter of an impecunious peer. No wonder that she was never tired of writing of the kindness and condescension of George III. and his Queen. These, whom the middle class still regarded with awe as celestial potentates, were always speaking and acting like men and women from Leicester Fields and St. Martin's Street, but their resemblance to common mortals always seemed to Fanny Burney the result of superhuman qualities. When one notes how, month after month, she could continue to write of George III. as if he were of different mind and matter from other men, one can feel how difficult was the task of Charles Fox and the Reform Party; for the King was largely supported in his political

action not by a popular belief in his sagacity, but by a blind and unreasoned idea in the necessary virtue and wisdom of the occupant of the throne. Single passages scarcely convey this feeling adequately to a reader, but it is perceptible in Fanny Burney's relation of her visit to the royal residence, after she had given up her place at Court, on the King's birthday, in 1792. She begins by a kind of mild invocation : " June 4. The birthday of our truly good King." Then she continues :

" As His Majesty had himself given me, when I saw him after the Queen's birthday, an implied reproach for not presenting myself at the palace that day, I determined not to incur a similar censure on this, especially as I hold my admission on such a national festival, a real happiness, as well as honour, when it is to see themselves."

The diarist next describes her dress and the manner of approaching the palace, and how she is received by Princess Elizabeth and then is ushered into the state drawing-room, where she finds the Queen : " her head attired for the drawing-room superbly, but the Court dress, as usual, remaining to be put on at St. James." The Queen was as pleasant and friendly as ever ; and " smiled upon me most graciously," says the gratified visitor, and then the King entered. " I motioned to retreat, but calling out ' What, Miss Burney ! ' the King came up to

me, and inquired how I did : and began talking to me so pleasantly, so gaily, so kindly even, that I had the satisfaction of remaining, and of gathering courage to offer my good wishes and warm, fervent prayers for this day. He deigned to hear me very benignly, or made believe he did, for I did not make my harangue very audibly, but he must be sure of its purport." The King, like a good-natured elderly gentleman, told his trembling visitor that she had grown "quite fat," and measured her arm with his spread thumb and forefinger, and says Fanny, "the whole of his manner showed his perfect approbation of the step I had taken, of presenting myself in the Royal presence on this auspicious day."<sup>1</sup>

The suggestion of a retreat when the Sovereign enters, the gathered courage, the warm, fervent prayers, the idea that he deigned to hear his subject benignly, the happy certainty of his perfect approbation, all indicate the feeling of an inferior being before one who could do no wrong, and they were described, not by a timid country girl, but by an intelligent lady who had served for several years in the royal household, who had been behind the scenes in the palace, and who, at home, was the friend of Burke and Windham, and was accustomed not only to hear frank political conversation, but to take part in it. In fact, in the very month in which she paid her respects to the King on his birthday, she tells us how "Mrs. Crewe, my father, and myself spent

<sup>1</sup> "Diary" (ed. A. Dobson), vol. v. p. 86.

the evening together a little in talking politics," and Mrs. Crewe, be it remembered, was a friend of Fox, a favourite toast of the Whig party, "Mrs. Crewe and Buff and Blue" always evoking enthusiasm. If Fanny Burney had this feeling we need not wonder that Lord North was so long Prime Minister.

Living in a cultured coterie, regarding mental, and especially literary, attainments as exceedingly admirable, Fanny Burney was as little of a blue-stockings as of a Grub Street hack, and she was as different from Mrs. Montagu with her ostentatious functions, her learning and wit, her parties and her grand air, as from Lady Sarah Banbury, full of her horses and her hunting and the last love-affair in high life, or from captivating and accomplished Lady Diana Beauclerk. She represents another and a newer phase of society than that in which these and other vivacious ladies figured, and which many people have fallen into the habit of regarding as altogether typical of the age. One of this section of society, Lady Diana herself, occasionally flits across the scene, as when Burke tells of unhappiness in her life, pointing out her house to our diarist. But those who belonged to the fashionable circle, though they were living at the same time and in the same town, were not personally acquainted with that group of the middle-class which was fond of letters, enjoyed wit without coarseness, and smiled at the affectation of the *précieuse* as much as at the countrywoman's want of manners. Nevertheless, Fanny Burney re-

flects the influence of Mrs. Montagu, whose learning, wit, and wealth, united to an almost apostolic desire to spread the worship of culture, made her a power greater than in these days it is easy to realize. "I should," Fanny Burney said, when Mrs. Thrale asked her if she wished to see this celebrated lady, "be the most insensible of all animals not to like to see our sex's glory."

But while Fanny Burney could appreciate the value of Mrs. Montagu's intentions and her undoubted ability, she was too shrewd not to perceive her shortcomings, for she continues: "A woman of such celebrity in the literary world would be the last I should covet to converse with, though one of the first I should wish to listen to." This was perfectly true, and consequently in her first interview, when "Evelina" was mentioned, she "began a vehement nose-blowing for the benefit of handkerchiefing my face," and when she was finally disclosed as the authoress of "Evelina" to the lady whom Mr. Crisp called, not good-naturedly, "a professed female wit, authoress, and Mæcenas into the bargain," she ran out of the room with the utmost trepidation. Patronized kindly, regarded partly with amusement and partly with admiration, at once a heroine and a curiosity, a charming and an attractive creature, Fanny Burney will ever remain the most representative woman of letters of the eighteenth century.





MRS. MONTAGU.



## CHAPTER XV

### THE NAVAL OFFICER

“HARK you, Mrs. Frog, you’d best hold your tongue for I must make bold to tell you, if you don’t, that I shall make no ceremony of tipping you out of the window.” This is one of the remarks, addressed to a French lady, which Fanny Burney puts into the mouth of Captain Mirvan, the naval officer, who, after seven years of active service at sea, had returned to England to enjoy a holiday with his family. The words are characteristic of his daily manner and of his habitual expressions, which surround him with an atmosphere of the pothouse and the pantomime. The fine capacity of realistic portraiture, which never forsook Fanny Burney, did not fail her when she was sketching this naval officer of the eighteenth century. Captain Mirvan was drawn from life, and the novelist was never more true in depiction of character than when she described the husband of the gentle Mrs. Mirvan. But though the sketch is accurate so far as it goes, the portrait is not only incomplete but one-sided, for it is one only of the

seaman on shore, where his simplicity, in contrast with the artificial manners of the landsman, causes him oftentimes to appear eccentric, even brutal, while his constant contact with realities at sea, the almost daily perils of his life, produced in him contempt for mere conventionalities.

The naval officer of the eighteenth century was a unique product of his age, exhibiting some of its qualities in a striking, even in an exaggerated form. A strange combination of contrasts, he was a hero and a bully; he united the bravery and the self-reliance of a seaman with the simplicity and the follies of a schoolboy. He was able to quote Latin with a university don, and at the same time surpass a bargee in foul language. One evening he might spend with the most degraded women in Portsmouth, the next be on his knees to a simpering miss. He might play a brutal practical joke on a midshipman who had just joined the ship, and on the morrow, without a moment's hesitation, risk his life for him. He drank himself to a state of imbecility, purloined stores, lent his money to a comrade in distress, or boarded a French frigate in the face of overwhelming numbers, with an equally cool and unhesitating disregard of consequences. His virtues were inherent qualities, partly personal and partly hereditary, his vices were largely the results of the naval system under which he lived, one which aggravated the grosser characteristics of his time and the lower tendencies of human nature.

The Navy was still in process of transition from a haphazard collection of armed merchant-vessels to the highly organized fleets and scientifically constructed ships of modern times. Discipline, in the eighteenth century, was unequal; in one ship it was preposterously lax; in another it was brutally severe;<sup>1</sup> one Captain was the butt, the other the terror, of his men. Smollett's Captain Oakum, who made life a misery to Roderick Random and his messmates on the *Thunder*, is no imaginary picture; his prototype was to be found in many ships of war in this particular epoch, when the naval officer, brave as he was before the enemy, not seldom found his career ended by a sentence of a court-martial dismissing him for cruelty and oppression. "Our first lieutenant, old Constable, was a devil of a tyrant. When I first asked him leave to go on shore for a few hours, he said he would see me in hell first; and on my thanking him for his kindness he swore if I did so again he would try me by a court-martial for my politeness. I was once 'starting' (with a rope's end or cane) the jolly-boat boys for being slack in getting into the boat, when old Constable being present and observing what I was about, 'Damn my eyes, sir,' says he, 'that's not the way; you should take a handspike and knock their brains out.'"<sup>2</sup>

The first effect of the rudimentary discipline which

<sup>1</sup> Masfield, "Sea Life in Nelson's Time," p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> "Recollections of James Anthony Gardner, Commander, R.N. 1775-1814)," p. 122. (Navy Records Society.)

was to be found on board ship was to give the captain—who was an autocrat—and his officers arbitrary powers, which were often exercised without a sense of responsibility, and only to gratify personal dislikes and a positive passion for cruelty. In 1787, when a small squadron of five vessels visited Quebec, the Governor ordered a review of the troops on the Plains of Abraham. The squadron considered that the most suitable compliment in return would be an execution. “In return for this brilliant and gratifying review, the Navy were about to amuse the natives by exhibiting an unfortunate veteran midshipman at the fore-yard arm of the *Resource*. This was prevented by Commodore Sawyer, who, more just and merciful than those who had condemned the man to death, reprieved him, but not until he had gone through the awful ceremony of placing the rope round his neck, which had such an effect as wellnigh to cause the poor man’s death. Bullen, the midshipman alluded to, had been many years at sea, and was considered a quiet, inoffensive person, but in a riotous scene in the cockpit of the *Resource* he was accused of striking the first lieutenant, Mr. Ratsey. The charge was considered false, and not proved by those who attended the court-martial; indeed, it was almost impossible to know who struck the lieutenant, as there was no light, or if he was struck at all otherwise than accidentally in the general scuffle. If Paul Minchin had gone through the disgraceful scene to which the poor midshipman was

obliged to submit, it would have been a just punishment for the disgraceful order of his ship.”<sup>1</sup>

Rougher natures had therefore the best time of it, and an officer who acted like a gentleman was often neither obeyed by his men nor respected by his comrades, so that gentler temperaments were obliged to assume the characteristics of the bully. Shipboard manners could not be put off with a uniform, and when an officer went ashore he often carried with him his coarse language, his oaths and his sea terms, his roughness and his horse-play, as well as a contempt for refinement. On land he had no opportunities of showing the self-reliance and bravery which life at sea in the eighteenth century constantly afforded, whether in battle or in the art of seamanship. “Being on shore at Gosport”—Commander Gardner is writing of his friend Culmer, the oldest midshipman in the Navy, and in those days a midshipman was not necessarily a boy—“on a Sunday, he tried to get into a tavern when the people were at church, and was thundering at the door to no purpose, when the late Captain N. H. Eastwood, of the Royal Navy, happening to be passing at the time in plain clothes, made some observations on his conduct, and said, ‘Mr. Culmer, you are a disgrace to the service.’” This reproach enraged the rather ancient midship-

<sup>1</sup> “Letters of Sir T. Byam Martin” (Navy Records Society), vol. i. p. 105. Bullen had only been found guilty of taking hold of him (the prosecutor) by the collar in a riotous and mutinous manner.—Minutes of Court-Martial, cited Martin (note), p. 105.

man and produced a scene by no means creditable to the excitable officer. Yet in his better moments he used to sing a song commemorative of the Dogger Bank action (August 5, 1781), the last stanza of which was descriptive of the finer qualities of these outwardly brutal beings.

“Then our ship being so disabled, and our rigging shot away,  
And twenty of our brave fellows killed in the bloody fray;  
And sixty-four were wounded, a dreadful sight to see,  
But yet the rest were willing to engage the enemy.”

The system, the method of life, the long periods of distant sea service, and the perpetual dangers from the enemy or from perils of the sea, accentuated elemental human qualities in a degree impossible in any other circumstances or in any other occupation. Brutality was constantly contrasted with bravery, and coarseness of language with tenderness of action. Still, though the naval officer may shock modern susceptibilities, he appeals to us by his simple and unostentatious heroism. When Captain Charles Pole, in the *Success*, captured a Spanish frigate off Cape Spartel, in March, 1782, Nelson touched on it in a few unimpassioned words: “Captain Pole,” he writes, “told me he wrote you yesterday. I am exceedingly happy at his success: in his seamanship he showed himself as much superior to the Don, as in his gallantry: and no man in the world so modest in his account of it.”<sup>1</sup> The calm and courageous figure of the Naval Officer is heroic on the ocean. When we analyse him more

<sup>1</sup> “Dispatches and Letters of Viscount Nelson,” vol. i. p. 61



closely we find that he carried some of the characteristic qualities of his century to excess, its common sense, its sturdy tenacity, its appreciation of the material object to be attained, and its absence of emotion.

Nelson's historic signal, which, like many historic lines, has lost some of its significance in daily usage, really expresses the radical basis of the mind of the naval officer—his country expected him to do his duty and he did it in his own way and according to his lights. He was without high or romantic ideals; he did not go into battle for patriotism, for religion, or for his lady love. He was engaged to fight, and when the time came he fought. He was engaged to navigate his ship to the best of his ability, and he encountered and overcame almost inconceivable and constantly recurring perils with an undaunted heart, and in the simplest spirit of duty. He was accustomed to rely on himself, and neither expected nor received sympathy from his comrades. When the captain of a ship lost an anchor near the Mewstone, and a request for another was sent to the Commissioner at Plymouth, the reply was: "I shall do no such thing. What brought you there? Go, and tell your captain if he gets into a hole he must get out of it again." Difficulties in fact formed part of the naval officer's daily life; they were obstacles which he had to overcome as a matter of course; sometimes they consisted in nothing worse than picking up a lost anchor without assistance,

sometimes in boarding a French frigate which had double the number of his own crew. If he fought bravely with the enemy, and worked his vessel through a winter's gale, he thought that he had done his duty; at other times he might drink too much and break all the commandments with an easy conscience.

The naval officer had the qualities which go to make a popular hero, especially in the age of which I am now attempting to depict some aspects; his virtues and his vices alike appealed to the people. Men in those days read of a battle at sea in the meagre paragraphs of a newsletter or of a periodical weeks after the conflict was concluded. The Battle of the Nile, for instance, was fought on the first and second of August, but the news of it did not arrive in London till October the second, and Nelson's official dispatch was only printed in the newspapers of October the third. The naval officer became, therefore, a hero of romance; the warlike and the maritime instincts of the people tended to his glory, and around him the imagination of those who stayed at home could gather such stories of bravery and daring as they pleased.

It is not surprising that naval officers should have formed an abnormal class, for they were at sea from childhood, isolated for months and years from their countrymen. Nelson was twelve years of age when he first set foot on a ship, Lord St. Vincent began his career at thirteen by a long voyage to Jamaica, and neither was an exception to the general

rule.<sup>1</sup> The child was taken from home and plunged into a narrow society of which grossness and brutality were marked characteristics, one which was astonishingly indifferent to human life and suffering, and in which dishonesty, in the shape of peculation of stores, was habitual and was not regarded as dishonourable. "Johnny Bone was a devil of a fellow at cap-à-bar (misappropriation of Government stores), and would stick at nothing. It is related that the late Lord Duncan, when he commanded the *Edgar*, once said to him, 'Whatever you do, Mr. Bone, I hope and trust you will not take the anchors from the bows.' " This is amusing enough to read now, but it certainly reveals a singular callousness to elementary principles of honesty.

One must not forget that the common sailor, far from being eager to fight for his country, was "pressed," as the phrase was, into the service, often at the very moment when he had returned home from a long and arduous overseas voyage. "Most cordially do I give you joy," wrote the Marquis of Buckingham, in 1793, to Lord Grenville—as indifferently as though referring to a drove of cattle in his park at Stowe—"of the arrival of the Jamaica and Lisbon fleets. I shall be impatient to learn what number of men have been taken out of them, but I know that it is estimated that these 250 sail ought to give 2,000 men, and God knows your fleet wants them ;

<sup>1</sup> After 1812 no boy, except the son of an officer, could be placed on a ship's books till he was thirteen.

it is, however, certain that there are many seamen in every port, if the press was as hot as it might be.”<sup>1</sup>

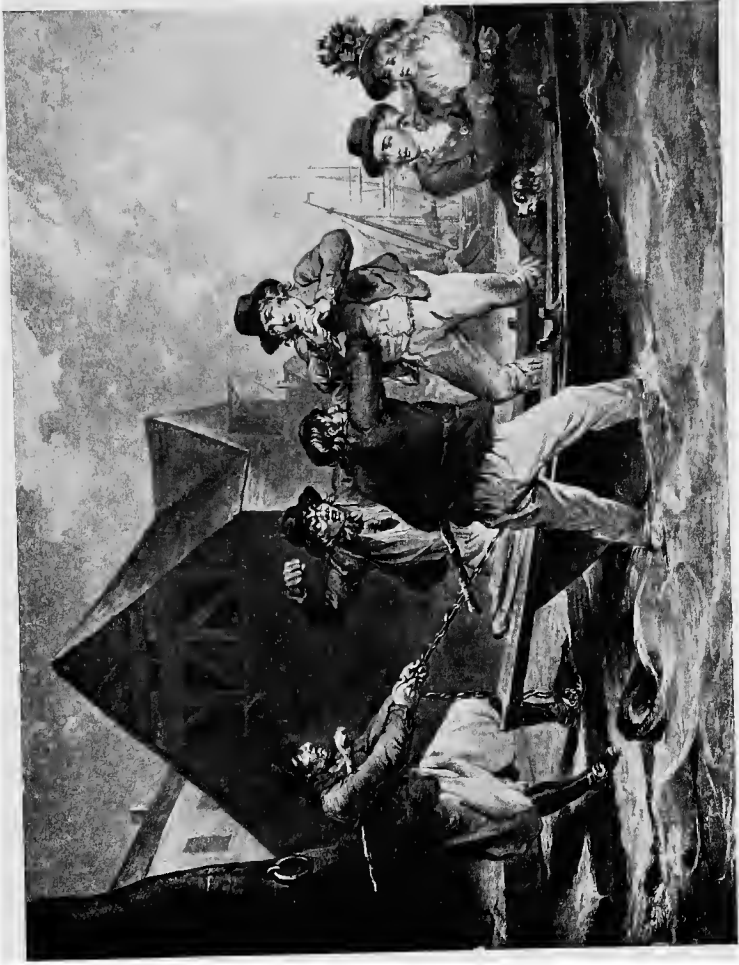
The seaman was carried off in irons, like a slave, to a man-of-war, and the officers had to maintain some kind of discipline over a crowd of discontented and turbulent men, ever ready to mutiny or to murder. The shortest way to stop mutiny was the sharp severity of Lord St. Vincent—the cat and the yard-arm. “I gave them (the crew) no time for reflection. Good, wholesome victuals, constant employment, and very severe flogging for every offence was their allowance; and an example I made of one mutinous fellow for an improper speech to the boatswain by giving him twelve dozen lashes, very effectively put a stop to consequences that might have been fatal, as one of my people whom I sent in a prize was tried, condemned, and executed, on board the *Ville de Paris* for mutiny of the most daring nature.”<sup>2</sup>

But this constant and harassing conflict—often for self-preservation—with the worst elements of mankind could not fail to brutalize an officer who was not an exception to the general run of human nature, and it stimulated a dormant love of cruelty to be found in not a few human beings.

The “youngster”—as he was called—went to sea, as I have said, at an age when most boys were sent to school. A battleship consequently became a seminary of an odd assortment of learning. The

<sup>1</sup> “Hist. M.S. Comm. 14th Rep.” App., pt. v., vol. ii. p. 422.

<sup>2</sup> “Journal of Admiral James,” p. 343 (Navy Records Society).



THE PRESS GANG.



schoolmaster—who was nearly always the chaplain—was often a clever man, sometimes an excellent scholar, but usually he occupied his position on a man-of-war because it was the last refuge of a drunkard, or of a dissolute spendthrift. “One night, several of us supped in the main hatchway berth on the orlop deck, when old Andrew Macbride, the schoolmaster (a man of splendid abilities, but unfortunately given to drinking), on this occasion got so drunk that Ned Moore, my worthy messmate, handed him a couple of tumblers of the juice of red pickled cabbage, and told him it was brandy-and-water, which he drank without taking the least notice.”<sup>1</sup> The following stanzas from a piece written by a rhyming midshipman on the same Macbride, are even more suggestive :

“From the raptures of grog shall a sage be controlled,  
And a man like myself submit to be schooled ?  
If I’m drunk, the lieutenant and captain may chide ;  
But I’ll drink till I die, says sweet Andrew Macbride.

“When I said the smell hurt me, the fools did believe ;  
Och hone ! my dear friends, I did you deceive ;  
When the taste or smell hurts me, may hell open wide,  
And I, damned there with water to drink, says Macbride.”

In fact, a boy often obtained a smattering of classical knowledge, of which he was always proud, from a man who was altogether unfitted to give him an adequate mental and moral training, and any virtues which the officer might show in later life—did he survive

<sup>1</sup> “Recollections of James Anthony Gardner,” p. 76 (Navy Records Society).

his first years at sea—were inborn, and seldom produced either by the precepts, or by the example, of the teacher. If schoolmasters were not men of this kind, they were “respectable, half-educated men who were rising in life, and sometimes became pursers, sometimes even lieutenants,” but who were unquestionably quite unfitted to be teachers.

By his early experience of the sea, however, the naval officer gained professionally what he lost in education and manners—self-reliance became a part of his being :

“Or if an unexpected call succeed,  
Come when it will, is equal to the need.”

He was a splendid seaman—dangers did not perturb him, hardships did not disturb him. From the moment he set foot on a ship he lived a life of extreme simplicity. Commander Gardner thus describes the place in which he lived, when, at the age of eleven, he found himself on the *Panther*, a frigate of sixty guns : “In this ship our mess-place had canvas screens scrubbed white, wainscot tables well polished, Windsor chairs, and a pantry fitted in the wing to stow our crockery and dinner traps with safety. The holy-stones and hand organs, in requisition twice a week, made our orlop deck as white as the boards of any crack drawing-room, the strictest attention being paid to cleanliness ; and everything had the appearance of Spartan simplicity. We used to sit down to a piece of salt beef, with sour krout, and dine gloriously



with our pint of black strap (some wine) after, ready at all calls, and as fit for battle as for muster.”

To Fanny Burney's sensitive nature the grosser characteristics of the seaman were obvious and offensive, and even Johnson, who was not squeamish, was shocked by his sensuality and by the way in which generosity degenerated into childish extravagance. If he could have seen the sailor in a gale of wind on a lee shore, or living cheerfully day after day on half an allowance of bad water and worse provisions, or in a tropical climate with messmates dying around him from yellow fever, instead of on land in a tavern, he would have formed a different opinion of him. For a man should be viewed with a careful regard to perspective if we would regard him as a hero, and the moment we meet with the seaman ashore all romance fades away from him.

The robust mind of Smollett could appreciate the seaman's fine qualities as well as his faults. Manly virtues, courage, and kindness, were conspicuous elements in the character of many naval officers, if cruelty was prominent in that of others. Tom Bowling's virile qualities outweigh his faults of manner, and one feels only admiration and goodwill for that boisterous and kindly sailor. Tom Bowling is in fact the sailor the popular hero; Captain Oakum is the tyrant at sea; Captain Mirvan is the naval officer much out of his element in a drawing-room.

In the eighteenth century the State was indifferent to the tone of the Navy. Merit did not always fail

to obtain recognition, but favouritism and corruption were rife, and bribes could do not a little in the lower ranks of the service to obtain promotion and appointments. Promotion was slow and unequal, capable men often failed to rise, and at last retired on a pittance after years of deserving service. On the other hand, if an officer were lucky, he might obtain a large sum of prize-money, and many thousands of pounds might reward a daring and fortunate commander. It was characteristic of the age and of the men that the hope of prize-money permeated the service, and filled the minds alike of young and old, of able seamen and of admirals: "If we have justice done us," wrote a light-hearted midshipman, in 1747, "we shall have a thousand pounds a man,"<sup>1</sup> and a senior officer thus couples promotion and prize-money: "Captain Bland informed me that both of us were to be made post-captains, and that he supposed the two prizes would give us each about three thousand pounds."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Life of Lord Anson," p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of Admiral James," p. 380. The most remarkable instance of the value of a prize in the eighteenth century is that of the Spanish vessel *Hermione* which was captured in May, 1762, by H.M. ships *Active* and *Favourite*, off Cadiz. The net proceeds, £519,165, were divided as follows:

	£	s.	d.
Admiral and Commodore . . .	64,963	3	9

*Active*

Captain . . . . .	65,053	13	9
3 Commissioned Officers (total) . . .	39,014	2	3

The more we study England in the eighteenth century the more we are struck by this singular figure at once striking and uncommon, exhibiting the elemental qualities and the rude simplicity of his Northern ancestors. Circumstances make him conspicuous, so that he is constantly before our eyes. Never before or since, has the navy played so dramatic, so active, or so long-sustained a part, as during the maritime wars of the eighteenth century, and public attention was fixed on the men who manned it. Time has to some extent assimilated the naval officer with the rest of his countrymen, though the sea will never leave its children without special characteristics, but during the reigns of the four Georges many circumstances tended to produce a class which was one of the most unique products of the age.

The naval officer typifies the British hero of the eighteenth century—as Montcalm, and de Levis,

	£	s.	d.
8 Warrant Officers (total) . . .	34,689	5	4
20 Petty Officers (total) . . .	36,130	17	8
158 men (total) . . .	76,132	13	0

*Favourite*

Captain . . . . .	64,872	13	9
2 Commissioned Officers . . .	25,949	1	6
7 Warrant Officers . . . . .	30,273	8	5
16 Petty Officers . . . . .	28,832	6	3
110 men . . . . .	53,253	14	4

Ralfe, "Naval Chronology," vol. i., p. 240.

and others like them, do the romantic Frenchman, half soldier and half adventurer, of the same period—types which stand out by contrast, and which often in those stirring times came into actual personal conflict.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE COUNTRY CLERGY

THE contrast between the life of the naval officer with its dangers and hardships in the foggy cold of the North Sea and in the pestilential heats of the Tropics, and the placid existence of the country clergyman in a tranquil and homely village in England, was not more vivid than that between the character of the two personalities. One, with all his faults, was independent and self-reliant, the other was obsequious and weak. As a minister of religion the country clergyman was without religious aspiration, enthusiasm, or fervour, nor was the want of spiritual attributes compensated by the exercise of a mundane but useful administrative capacity. The feeling with which he was regarded by his contemporaries was one partly of pity and partly of contempt, yet this was the man who was found all over England, one of two main divisions, the beneficed clergy with their assistants the curates, and the unbeneficed parsons who were the domestic chaplains of peers and squires.

In the first half of the century domestic chaplains were ubiquitous; but as the century progressed their numbers diminished, though they were still a distinct

and considerable body among the country clergy. They were largely responsible for the patent demoralization of the clergy. Little better, in fact, than upper servants, they were inferior in some respects, indeed, to those who, at any rate, passed their days in honest toil. The domestic chaplain, on the contrary, was an idler, for at the best his clerical duties were of a perfunctory kind, and he was selected not from the point of view of religion, but to minister to the wants and the humours of his master, whether nobleman or untitled landowner; he was factotum, agent, jester, and boon companion. We may select as an example from actual life one Mick Broughton, a facetious Irishman, a raconteur and a collector of gossip who, in the middle of the century, was chaplain, and made himself generally useful, to the Duke of Montrose and, later to the second Duke of Richmond.<sup>1</sup> In fiction Parson Supple, upon whom Squire Western could vent his bad humour, is a well-known type of many of his contemporaries.

The treatment of the domestic chaplain by his employer of course varied, but generally he was more the slave of arbitrary whims and fancies than the domestic servant, and while he had to ape the gentleman he was treated as a menial. It was, for instance, a general practice for the chaplain—much against his will—to leave the dinner table at the end of the second course, unkindly deprived of the most dainty part of the meal. “To so ridicu-

<sup>1</sup> Earl of March, “A Duke and His Friends,” p. 444.

lous a height is the foolish custom grown, that even the Christmas pie, which in its very nature is a kind of unconsecrated cake and a badge of distinction, is often forbidden to the Druid of the family.”<sup>1</sup> This is but one piece of evidence, among many others, of the degraded position of the domestic chaplain—a man who, in the words of an old rhyme, was hired for “diet, a horse, and thirty pounds a year.” Like the Barthélemys and the Arnauds and other clever abbés, on the other side of the Channel, who played the part of intellectual tame cats in the salons and châteaux of the nobles, the English domestic chaplain is a remarkable, but a more unpleasant, figure on the scene.

The beneficed clergy, as also the unbeneficed chaplains, were usually men of humble birth who, if they had been educated at a university, had passed through it in an inferior position. At Oxford the servitors, and at Cambridge the sizars, who performed menial offices, as well as obtained learning, were those from whom the country clergy were chiefly recruited, but “scholars” and pensioners, in fact, all poor students, as distinguished from men of independent fortune, were to a great extent taken from a lower social grade than they are at present.<sup>2</sup> They were admittedly inferior to the fellow commoners, who comprised the well-to-do undergraduates,

<sup>1</sup> *The Tatler*, No. 255, November 23, 1770.

<sup>2</sup> “Wordsworth, Social Life at the English Universities in the Eighteenth Century,” p. 98.

and so at an early age the future clergyman was regarded, and regarded himself, as on a lower social plane than the gentry. From his boyhood he was taught to know his place, and whether chaplain or incumbent, he seldom forgot it. But he received the best education to be had in England, not in an ecclesiastical seminary, but among laymen of various social degrees. It was his misfortune that, in most cases, the knowledge which he had gained at Oxford or Cambridge soon grew dull amid the bucolic occupations of a poor country living, but at any rate it may be placed to his credit that he was never a religious bigot, and never sought after ecclesiastical domination. He was without the self-consciousness and pose which too often distinguish modern ecclesiastics, and his religious shortcomings even tended to the individual freedom of his parishioners.

When the clergy were not derived from a humble social stratum they were generally the younger sons of squires, and were placed in family preferments solely from financial considerations. But the rich living was rare, and was seldom bestowed on a man without family or political interest, and we must, therefore, try to realize how numerous and how small were the stipends of the country clergy as a body. It helps to this realization when we note that the Crown livings in the gift of the Lord Chancellor were all under twenty pounds a year in value.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W.<sup>h</sup>Pitt to Lord Grenville, "Hist. M.S. Comm. 14th Report," App., part v., vol. ii. p. 439.



If we take two instances from contemporary fiction, we have the classical examples of worthy Dr. Primrose who, as Vicar of Wakefield, received an income of thirty-five pounds a year, while good-hearted Parson Adams had only a stipend of twenty-three pounds on which to keep his wife and six children.

Not only was the remuneration insufficient, it was often difficult to obtain, and tithes were painfully wrung from landowners and farmers. The poorer clergy were disheartened by their poverty, and were obliged to be obsequious to their more fortunate neighbours, and the richer were indifferent to everything but their own pleasures. Mrs. Thrale's genial friend, Dr. Whalley, accepted a lucrative living on the condition that he should never reside in the parish, because it was an unhealthy place, and so, while he enjoyed himself at Bath and scribbled verses for Lady Miller's Bath Easton vase, or played the dilettante at Florence, a poor curate did his work among the peasantry of the parish.<sup>1</sup>

If a clergyman were in comfortable circumstances it was usually because he was a pluralist. One cannot take up a publication which contains domestic intelligence without seeing the death announced of some clergyman who held more than one benefice, as in the *Town and Country Magazine* for April, 1782, where one notes the deaths of

<sup>1</sup> Broadly, "Dr. Johnson and Mrs. Thrale." With an Essay Introductory by Thomas Seccombe, App. p. 308.

two rectors on the same day, each of whom held two benefices in different counties. By force of circumstances, therefore, duty was neglected, and this condition of things caused in some cases the existence of a number of very poorly paid assistants, so that this widespread pluralism from each point of view tended to the degradation of the country clergy. It was evident to the best friends of the Church. "What fruit is to be expected from the labours of a pastor who is willing to do all the good he can, is contented to drudge on with his little allowance, in hopes of seeing some good effect from his labours among his parishioners, but notwithstanding his best endeavours, falls into contempt of the meanest of them, which his poverty alone, without any personal demerit of his own to add to it, is sufficient to bring upon him?"<sup>1</sup>

No man was more sincerely religious or more tolerant in his views than Cowper, yet even he was obliged to admit that the clergy as a class were—with exceptions such as the Rev. John Newton, Vicar of Olney, who was at any rate earnest, if narrow-minded—open to much condemnation. So late in the century as 1790 he wrote to a clerical correspondent of a new bishop's work: "If he will keep the clergy to their business he shall have trouble, let him go where he may. And this is boldly spoken, considering I speak it to one of that reverend body. Some of

<sup>1</sup> John Elton, "Thesaurus Rerum Ecclesiasticarum," 1744. Preface, p. v.

you could not be better and some of you are stark naught.”<sup>1</sup>

It must be admitted that the poor country parson was, after all, more to be pitied than to be blamed. Fixed in a remote country home, with an insufficient income and a too sufficient family, often in debt, sometimes sent to prison, he lived in a style little removed from, and often with daily agricultural work similar to, that of the uncouth farmers around him. Pigs and poultry foraged around the doorway of his house, and within, badly nourished children played about the rooms. John Wesley's father, who was both a scholar and a man of refinement—whose son has made the village of Epworth in Lincolnshire famous as his birthplace—was blessed by Providence with nineteen children, was always in straitened circumstances, and was once put in gaol for debt.<sup>2</sup> He differed only from the neighbouring clergy in being both pious and learned.

With hardly any hope of advancement, and devoid of religious enthusiasm, the country clergyman was a remarkable contrast to the masses of the middle class. The farmer, even the day-labourer, being forced to toil, received some stimulus from daily work. The incumbent, who could be as idle as he liked, would have felt more keenly the dreariness of his position, if he had not, like Fielding's Parson Trullibar, been often not only something of a farmer and a judge

<sup>1</sup> “Cowper's Letter to the Rev. W. Bagot,” June 22, 1790.

<sup>2</sup> Tyerman, “Life of Wesley,” vol. i. p. 17.

of live stock, but one of the farming class. With little or no spiritual enthusiasm, however, nothing could prevent him from becoming a clerical drone. Active supervision by a superior, whether lay or ecclesiastical, is an incentive to exertion; but in the eighteenth century most bishops were not in the least inclined to take this view of their functions, and even those who were not unmindful of their authority exercised it so timidly that it had no weight. "Our liturgy," said Bishop Secker who, in 1741, became Archbishop of Canterbury, in a charge to the clergy of the Diocese of Oxford, which was essentially a rural one, "consists of evening as well as of morning prayer, and no inconvenience can arise from attending it, provided persons are within tolerable distance of church. Few have business at that time of day, and amusements ought never to be preferred on the Lord's day before religion, not to say that there is room for both." Very tolerant advice, no doubt, but not of the kind to keep the country clergy up to the mark. Thus, "mere appendages to the nobility and squirearchy,"<sup>1</sup> without pressure from above and without spiritual stimulus from within, the country clergy were in a deplorable state, which was certain to result in some form of ecclesiastical revolution.

John Wesley was a country curate, and the beginning of his career was, in fact, an individual revolt against the existing state of the country clergy as ministers

<sup>1</sup> Stephen, "English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century," p. 49.

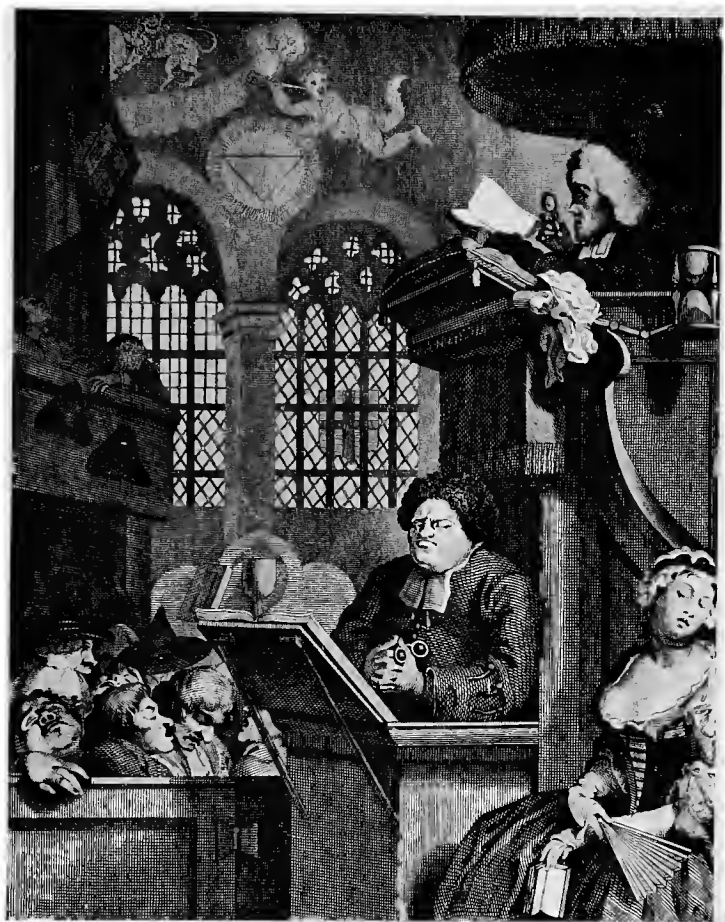
of religion. Pious, energetic, and with a keen perception of practical values and administration, these qualities were daily shocked by the complete absence of them in the ministers of religion in rural parts. Wesley, in fact, personified the revolt of the new middle class against the lethargy of the clergy of the Established Church, and as the founder of modern Nonconformity he laid the foundation of what is in one sense a lasting reminder of the country clergy of the eighteenth century. Visible everywhere throughout the rural districts, they are prominent figures on one part of the scene, and, in the aspect which they present to us, they are inseparably associated with this particular epoch.

It must be remembered that since the Reformation the rural clergy had been in a parlous state, and that the social conditions which have been briefly described were not worse in the eighteenth than in the seventeenth century. But the vitality and energy which marked the new middle class, and the capacity and culture which characterized the aristocracy with all its faults, make the supineness in this age of the rural clergy the more noticeable. Some of the intellectual and moral conditions of the time developed in the clergy into vices. Want of enthusiasm degenerated into disregard of duty, toleration became indifference. The absence of any desire to secure proselytes, so contrary to the policy of the Roman Catholic Church, caused the clergy to drift into the opposite extreme, so that they cared

not whether their parishioners were religious or irreligious. The fear of Romanism, which had in the days of Charles II. and James II. been so important and disturbing a factor among all classes of the nation, had not wholly died away, and "ornate and frequent services and symbolism of all kinds were regarded with suspicion, and consequently infrequent services, and especially infrequent communions, carelessness about the Church fabrics, are conspicuous among the Church abuses of the period."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, a vigorous sermon savoured of Puritanism, and was especially objectionable to the Tory squires, among whom the country parson passed his days, and on whose goodwill the comfort of his life not a little depended. In fact, the combination of several epochal influences with the existence of a Church established by law, and bad social conditions, prevented the clergy of the Church of England from being affected by forces which were working so strongly among other classes. They remained tranquil and supine in a torpid backwater, unmoved by the stream which was vitalizing large sections of the people. Whether as a body they were dissatisfied with their lot, it is difficult now to determine. Once Jacobite, and always Tory, they were out of touch with the middle class, to which they generically belonged, and at the same time they were treated with contempt by the squires with

<sup>1</sup> Abbey and Overton, "The English Church in the Eighteenth Century," p. 282.



THE SLEEPING CONGREGATION.





whom they were politically connected. When they were esteemed by their neighbours, it was not for religious merit, but for simple human qualities—not as ministers but as men. By the nobility they were regarded with absolute indifference.

Like the peasantry who lived in cottages around the parsonage, the country clergy in the eighteenth century touched the lowest depth, social, professional, and intellectual, and it was not until their material condition was improved in the nineteenth century by such measures as the Union of Small Benefices Act 1809, and the Tithes Commutation Act 1836, that they began to attain more to the average middle-class standard of life.

Spiritual enthusiasm alone can lift men who are otherwise commonplace priests above the worldly crowd to which they humanly belong. In the succeeding age various circumstances tended to produce some religious fervour, and as higher ideals of social duty, of which the new provincial citizen was the best exponent at the end of the eighteenth century, came into vogue, and a more ornate and emotional ritual began to prevail, the country clergy slowly emerged from the depths to which they had sunk at the time when this survey is taken of the English Scene.

The peasants, their companions in misfortune, like them, the victims of overwhelming circumstances, alone remain to complete this picture of the age.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE PEASANT

THE peasant fitly forms the last, as the nobleman did the first, figure on this portion of our Scene. We have passed from an infinitesimal body of men at the summit of political power and of social influence, who of all Englishmen most enjoyed their existence, to a mass of human beings who in every respect were exactly their opposite, and who may have oftentimes regretted that they ever had been born. For the peasant towards the close of the eighteenth century is a pathetic figure. As England increased in population and wealth, and as the middle class became more numerous and more prosperous, he became, as the century advanced, more dependent, less hopeful, less thrifty, and less sober. He was a victim of social and economical changes which benefited every other section of the community but which forced him to become a helpless hireling, one of a class henceforth sharply defined, and divided acutely from those above it, without the attachment of the farmer to the land, and without the gradually increasing common force and higher pay of the artisans in the new manufacturing towns—a man who was compelled to live on a small

weekly wage in a precarious present and always in dread of the future.

The link between the small farmer and the day-labourer, which had been a marked feature of agricultural life before the eighteenth century, was during this age gradually broken, with all that it implied in hope, independence, and personal pride, in its connexion between manual labour and possession of the soil, and in the opportunities which it afforded for social and material advancement. Small farms, says that keen observer Arthur Young, were "the first step which those labourers, servants, and others in general take when possessed of money enough to begin business."<sup>1</sup> In other words, the labourer had before him until the end of the seventeenth century some hope and prospect of rising to a higher social and economic position. It was the pity of a change, which increased in force as the century drew on, one—the immense importance of which was not at the time foreseen—that it placed a permanent barrier before the upward progress of the tiller of the soil, and reduced him to a state of semi-servility. A free man, he had yet not a few of the characteristics, economic and political, of a—slave dependence on the will of a master, powerlessness, admitted inferiority to those above him, want of the attributes of a citizen. From this state of degradation it has since been the object of reformers of every kind and party to raise him.

<sup>1</sup> Farmer's "Letters," 3rd edition, vol. i. p. 94.

This downward tendency—accentuated by the disappearance of domestic industries and the consequent divorce of a portion of the industrial population from the soil—continued throughout the century and into that which followed, so that in relation to the English peasantry the age is one essentially of transition, increasing certain deplorable features of rural life which had not for many years been altogether absent.

The momentous results of this transition were visible from one end of England to the other, but in the North—in Westmorland, Cumberland, Lancashire—and also in Cheshire, as well as in Cornwall and Kent, the fall was less felt. Circumstances there enabled the workman of the fields to retain his independence longer, but both in the North and in the South during the eighteenth century he was fast becoming a man without a stake in the country, without self-respect, and without hope. “Formerly many of the lower sort of people occupied tenements of their own with parcels of land about them, or they rented such of others. On these they raised for themselves a considerable part of their subsistence, without being obliged, as now, to buy all they want at shops. And this kept numbers from coming to the parish. But since those small parcels of ground have been swallowed up in the contiguous farms and enclosures, and the cottages themselves have been pulled down, the families which used to occupy them are crowded together in decayed farmhouses,

with hardly ground enough about them for a cabbage garden; and being thus reduced to *mere* hirelings, they are, of course, very liable to come to want. . . . Thus an amazing number of people have been reduced from a comfortable state of partial independence to the precarious condition of hirelings, who, when out of work, must immediately come to the parish.”<sup>1</sup>

The importance of this passage lies in the fact that it is a statement by a country clergyman of things as he saw them, and as they existed around him in the pleasant county of Berkshire. In picturesque villages, in elm-lined lanes, on upland downs, and in river valleys, the peasantry were descending, as Davies pithily puts it, “from a comfortable state of partial independence to the precarious condition of hirelings.” This is the main, the cardinal fact to be grasped if, in a view of the English Scene in the eighteenth century, we would rightly understand the position of the class whose charming surroundings obscured its wretchedness. And this social descent was contemporaneous with the social ascent of numbers of the middle class, and with a remarkable growth of national comfort and wealth.

The rural labourer was insufficiently paid and badly fed. His average weekly wages over England may be taken at about eight shillings a week, and these earnings were insufficient to cover his expenditure. “All the budgets tell the same tale of im-

<sup>1</sup> “The Case of Labourers in Husbandry stated and considered by David Davies, Rector of Barkham, Berks.” Bath, 1795.

poverished diet accompanied by an overwhelming strain, and an actual deficit. The normal labourer, even with constant employment, was no longer solvent.”<sup>1</sup> It is true that the price of meat was low; but this fact was useless to the peasant because his wages were not high enough to enable him to buy this kind of food. When Arthur Young made a tour through the South of England in 1764 he found that generally the price of bread was 2*d.* a pound. If we take the district around Oxford as an instance, it appears from Young’s journal that wages were 1*s.* a day, except in hay time, when they rose to 1*s.* 6*d.*, and in harvest, when they reached 2*s.* The average therefore in Oxfordshire for the whole year could have been little over six shillings a week. Under these financial conditions the fact that mutton and beef were each only 4*d.* a pound<sup>2</sup> was of no assistance to the agricultural labourer; to him they were luxuries which he could not purchase. But towards the last third of the century prices increased out of proportion to the increase of wages,<sup>3</sup> and so the economic condition of the peasant became worse. In almost every family there was a deficit at the end of the year, and the peasant looked to parish relief as an ordinary addition to his earnings; “house rents and

<sup>1</sup> J. L. and B. Hammond, “The Village Labourer, 1760–1870,” p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> “Six Weeks’ Tour Through the Southern Counties” (3rd edition), 1772, p. 323.

<sup>3</sup> Hasbach, “A History of the English Agricultural Labourer,” p. 116.

repairs were paid by the parish, and relief in money or kind was distributed, the poor, when not too infirm, attending at the vestry to receive their portions. Medical relief was freely given, three or more different doctors receiving an annual settlement of their accounts.”<sup>1</sup> The poor-rate, in fact, became a substitute for wages, for deserving and undeserving alike.

A single set of figures will, for the purpose of the present view, sufficiently demonstrate the increase in the amount of poor relief between the middle and the end of the century, when, as we have seen, there was a striking change in the size and in the prosperity of the manufacturing towns. In 1750 the population of England was 6,467,000, the expenditure on poor relief was £689,000, or 2·2 per head. By 1800 the population had risen to 9,140,000, but the cost of relief had become out of all proportion to the increase of population, for it was £3,861,000, or 8·5 per head.<sup>2</sup> It is evident that during this half-century the peasant was being almost everywhere pauperized.

The law of settlement was another factor detrimental to the well-being of the labourer, on which a treatise might be written. Beginning with legislation in 1662,<sup>3</sup> the law became more and more strict, with a view to prevent persons who might become chargeable on the rates from gaining a settlement

<sup>1</sup> Davis, “Life in an English Village (Corsley, Wilts),” p. 73.

<sup>2</sup> Garnier, “Annals of the British Peasantry,” p. 225.

<sup>3</sup> 13 and 14 Charles II., c. 12.

in a new parish. So strict indeed did the law become, so closely was the admittance of a newcomer to a parish guarded by regulations and conditions often impossible of fulfilment, that a married peasant was virtually affixed to the parish where he was born. In early days, when the agricultural labourer was not a mere hireling, when he was one of a village community with interests in common fields, this immobility was scarcely an evil. But the moment this connexion with the land ceased, when agriculture was placed on a more businesslike footing, and when it became desirable that the peasant should be able to move from parish to parish to obtain work, the law of settlement made him almost as immovable as the slave in Virginia or Kentucky.

Thus, everything tended to make the peasant as thriftless as he was hopeless. He married young, he commonly begat a large family, which he had neither the means to educate, even when there was a school available, nor to clothe sufficiently, and he was continually in debt to the village storekeeper, who personified in the rural districts the commercial progress of the age. He and his family lived on insufficient fare—a little bread, rarely a scrap of meat, sometimes a bit of bacon, poor vegetables, weak tea, and unwholesome beer. Milk and poultry he could no longer obtain, for pasturage and common were now alike taken from him. From the want of ground on which his spare time could be employed, he drifted to the ale-house for his amusement, and drink was his only means





THE VILLAGE ALE-HOUSE.



of excitement. It is in this age that the evils of the modern public-house may be regarded as having their beginning.

Most persons are more or less kind-hearted, and the poverty of the labourer now made him in every parish the object of charity, in an age when, through increasing wealth, other classes of the community were able to give of their possessions more liberally than heretofore. So that, at the very time when he was becoming more dependent on poor relief, the peasant was also becoming an habitual and subservient recipient of alms. The aggregate of charitable gifts, of beneficent donors, and of humble receivers became immense, and the agricultural labourer was everywhere regarded—as he regarded himself—as a man born to be assisted by poor relief or charity from the cradle to the grave. A feeling of dependence became habitual on the one side, and of good-natured contempt on the other, for one who was always in want. These views were accentuated by the fact that the agricultural labourer had neither local nor political influence, and had no more voice in the management of his village or his country than if he had been really a slave.

In the eighteenth century the modern relations—at any rate as they existed for the most part of the nineteenth century and which came to be regarded as a natural social feature—between the labourer and the farmer, the squire, the parson, and the well-to-do residents in the country became

stereotyped. Everything tended, in fact, to emphasize the peasant's dependent condition; as society in general became less archaic, he became more servile. Well-intentioned but mischievous legislation accentuated this state of servility. To keep the able-bodied out of the workhouse the Legislature, in 1782, passed an Act which from the name of its author, a well-known social reformer, was called Gilbert's Act.<sup>1</sup> It resulted in what became known as the Roundsman system. Though it illustrates the state of the agricultural labourer in the eighteenth century, the practice was more fatal in its effect at the beginning of the nineteenth, and it was the hardship of it that it increased the degradation of the labourer.

"The Roundsman system itself was split into three sub-species, the ordinary system, the special system, and the pauper auction. By the first and most usual, the parish in general makes some agreement with a farmer to sell him the labour of one or more paupers at a certain price, and pays to the pauper, out of the parish funds, the difference of that price and the allowance which the scale, according to the price of bread, and the number of his children, awards him.' By the second, 'the parish contracts with some individual, to have some work performed for him by paupers at a given price, the parish paying the paupers.' By the auction system the unemployed, including the aged and infirm, were put up to auction weekly or monthly, and knocked down to the highest

<sup>1</sup> 22 Geo. III. c. 83.

bidder.”<sup>1</sup> The pauper and the peasant were, in a large measure, one and the same, and thus even legislation tended to emphasize the dependent condition of the labourer; and as English society generally advanced, he retrograded.

In past times—to the beginning of the century—the tiller of the soil, other than the yeoman, had been either a servant or a labourer. In the first case he was lodged, fed, and paid by the employer; in the second, “as a rule, he had a small holding of his own, and he also had incomings from the commons.” In the one case he was a member of a family whose interests were his, sharing in his employer’s good or ill fortune; in the other he belonged to an agricultural partnership, and had some of the independence which produces strength of character and happiness of existence. He fell into the pitiful state in which we view him in the eighteenth century, not through any faults of his own, but through the incidence of extraordinary and numerous causes,<sup>2</sup> economic, social, and political, which in that century all tended to this same result—the degradation of the peasant.

To depict a landscape is one thing, to analyse the causes of it is another; and it is not with an investigation of the factors which determined the position of the peasant toward the end of the century

<sup>1</sup> Hasbach, “History of the English Agricultural Labourer,” p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> Cunningham, “Growth of English Industry and Commerce,” pp. 713 *et seq.*

that I am now concerned ; it is with his aspect as he stands on the scene before us, a depressing and a deplorable figure.

If one passed from village to village exceptions to this general outlook were still to be observed. In some parts were yet to be found cottagers with rights of common of various kinds—of pasturage for cattle in common fields, or on unenclosed ground, or with lesser rights, such as those for geese and pigs to feed on waste land on what is now popularly known as a common. Squatters were also still to be noted, men who lived “near, in, or upon the commons and woods where they had built themselves huts, and perhaps cleared a little piece of land,”<sup>1</sup> who enjoyed a free and independent kind of existence, working sometimes for themselves, sometimes for a farmer.

But each class was in process of extinction, and though the aspect of the peasantry varies in places, it is generally one of a patient and hopeless class spread over nearly all the rural districts of England, victims of wars and of their attendant taxation, of a more businesslike and scientific system of farming, of the increased cost of the necessities of life—through the demands of the growing towns—<sup>2</sup> of the accelerated enclosure of commons<sup>3</sup> and com-

<sup>1</sup> Hasbach, “History of the Agricultural Labourer,” p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> Gonner, “Common Land and Inclosure,” p. 381.

<sup>3</sup> “In the reign of George II. 318,776 acres were enclosed ; in that of George III. 5,686,400.”—Hasbach, p. 58.

mon fields, of the consolidation of farms, and of the decrease of domestic industries. We see the peasant living among landlords and tenants who, in their several ways, were essentially capitalists, and whose pecuniary interests were opposed to his; in a peaceful and picturesque environment, but with his freedom of life much curtailed by inevitable changes. At the same time he was more exposed to the severity of a cruel criminal law than any other Englishman. He passed his life in villages which have in many places changed but little since those times, in an Arcadia which was one in appearance only. A new and miserable state of society existed amidst the old surroundings, and "the century of steady social and industrial development" was a time of exceeding hardship for the agricultural labourer, for "the whole face of the country was changed by the Industrial Revolution"<sup>1</sup> which, while it increased the productiveness of the land, weighed heavily on the peasant, and on the small industrial workers of the country towns.

Such is the aspect of the peasantry in the eighteenth century as it presents itself when we regard the scene. It will make us realize these aspects better if we conclude this outlook by a contemporary description, for it is difficult for us to understand the overwhelming cataclysm which wholesale enclosure in a district brought upon the industrial and

<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, "Growth of English Industry and Commerce," p. 613.

social life of a village. The Rev. Richard Warner was a clergyman of Bath, of cultivated tastes and accurate observation, who liked to ramble about England. On a tour through the West, in 1799, he came to Cheddar in Somersetshire, and there a labourer civilly gave him information as to the disappearance of some ancient *tumuli*. "This voluntary effusion of inborn good-nature," says the tourist, "introduced some conversation on my part, and led to an inquiry relative to the ancient and present state of Cheddar commons." Then follow the statements of the peasant, and, what is equally important and interesting, the reflections of the listener : " ' Ah, sir,' said my new acquaintance, ' time was, when these commons enabled the poor man to support his family, and bring up his children. Here he could turn out his cow and pony, feed his flock of geese, and keep his pig. But the *inclosures* have deprived him of these advantages. The labourer now has only his 14*d.* per day to depend upon, and that, sir (God knows), is little enough to keep himself, his wife, and, perhaps, five or six children, when bread is 3*d.* per lb., and wheat 13*s.* per bushel. The consequence is, the parish must now assist him. Poor-rates increase to a terrible height. The farmer grumbles, and grows hard-hearted. The labourer, knowing that others *must maintain* his family, if he do not do it himself, becomes careless, or idle, or a spendthrift, whilst the wife and children are obliged to struggle with want, or to apply to a surly overseer for a scanty allowance. This is the case with Cheddar,



now, sir, which (added he, with particular emphasis) is *ruined for everlasting.*'”

“The observations of the honest fellow seemed to be founded on such strong facts, that my prior opinion on this subject was, I confess, somewhat shaken. That much *general* good arises from the inclosing system is not to be doubted; the sum of productive labour is increased, vast tracts of land are brought into cultivation, and additional crops of grain produced; but these advantages are purchased by so large a proportion of *individual* evil, that it becomes a question of morals as well as policy, a question as difficult as it is important; whether that system ought to be generally adopted. Perhaps, were we to take the trouble of inquiring into the effects produced by it, where it has been followed, we should find them to be nearly similar to those above mentioned; whilst the same observation would also evince that the price of grain had not abated in proportion to the additional quantities produced by it, nor the wages of the labourer been raised in proportion to the loss of those advantages of which he had been deprived by it.

“Perhaps, also (I only speak *hypothetically*), we should discover that the chief advantage resulting from it had attached to the neighbouring *landlord*, the value of whose estate was increased; the *farmer*, the profits of whose husbandry were enlarged; and the *rector*, the *quantum* of whose *composition* was swollen by the system; whilst the *labouring peasantry*,

the nerves and muscles of the country, deprived of those advantages which enabled them to participate in some of the *humbler* comforts of life, and kept alive that energy and industry which arise from a *consciousness* of *independence*, of whatever degree it may be, sunk into listlessness, or quitted in despair their useful labours for the carelessness of a military life; melting gradually away, and leaving us to experience and regret the truth of the poet's prophetic apostrophe:"<sup>1</sup>

"Ill fares that land, to hast'ning ill a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;  
Princes and Lords may flourish, or may fade;  
A breath can make them, as a breath has made;  
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
When once destroy'd, can never be supply'd."

The peasant—unexpected—stood helpless, while the forces of what are called progress, for the time being, thrust him back. Discoveries which were increasing the wealth of new capitalists, and the application of economic theories which demonstrated the futility of the old rural and agricultural systems, were ruining him. At the same time, well-meaning social reformers and legislators were trying experiments upon him. He had nothing to say for himself, and against forces and experiments he was equally powerless.

<sup>1</sup> "A Walk through some of the Western Counties of England," by the Rev. Richard Warner of Bath, p. 51.

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